

**CONFERENCE ON BREAKTHROUGH MEASURES TO BUILD A NEW EAST WEST  
CONSENSUS ON WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION  
AND DISARMAMENT**

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**Seizing the Moment: Highest Priority Steps for 2009**

The *Brahmastra*, a weapon made by the Gods in Hindu mythology, was known to possess catastrophic powers of destruction. Its use was strictly forbidden, except in dire straits, such as when all else failed to repel the onslaught of the demons.

The parallel between the *Brahmastra* and the nuclear weapon is irresistible. But the nuclear weapon is not a myth. It is an apocalyptic reality of life facing both the “demons” and “devatas” of today.

A Committee that assessed the damage caused by atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had stated: “The magnitude of the killing is, in essence, better termed genocide -- if not also sociocide, biocide, and earthicide -- for it is a complete negation of human existence.” That is why the epitaph on the Hiroshima Cenotaph reads: “Please rest in peace, for the error will not be repeated.”

**India’s Approach to Nuclear Disarmament**

India’s approach to disarmament has been consistent . We have always believed that abolition of nuclear weapons can be achieved only through global nuclear disarmament. Disarmament cannot be achieved with mere arms control. Nor can the world take an all-or-nothing approach. What is needed is pragmatism. We recognise the need for a step-

by-step approach to climbing the hill. But those steps must lead to a specific, unambiguous goal and outcome. Such steps cannot be goals in themselves.

In a last ditch effort, before having to accept India's strategic necessity of nuclear weapons, Rajiv Gandhi at the United Nations General Assembly on June 9, 1988 warned the world: "Left to ourselves, we would not want to touch nuclear weapons. But when tactical considerations in the passing play of great power rivalries are allowed to take precedence over the imperatives of non-proliferation, with what leeway are we left?" In the very same speech, he proposed an 'Action Plan' that included:

- A binding commitment by all nations to eliminate nuclear weapons in three stages by 2010.
- Tangible progress at each stage to demonstrate good faith and build the required confidence.
- Changes in doctrines, policies, and institutions to sustain a world free of nuclear weapons.

The end of the Cold War led to greater engagement among nations and the realization of the inter-dependent nature of global security. This created a new space for action on disarmament. We have been able to finalize the Chemical Weapons Convention (1993) -- a multilateral, non-discriminatory treaty aimed at eliminating an entire category of weapons of mass destruction by 2012. But the goal of nuclear disarmament has remained a mirage.

## **New Threats and Challenges**

Meanwhile, new kinds of threats and challenges have now begun to confront national, regional and global security. There is a growing risk of nuclear materials, devices and weapons being acquired by terrorists, non-state actors who consider suicide bombing an effective militant strategy or by countries that are driven by extreme ideologies. We also face the spectre of a renewed nuclear push even from those within

the treaty. Recently, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Dr Mohammad ElBaradei warned that there could be 30 ‘virtual new weapon states’ on the horizon. There are developments, such as the A.Q. Khan Proliferation network on the electronic media, North Korea’s nuclear test and uranium enrichment programmes. The A.Q. Khan episode has symbolized the opacity, complexity and contradictions that characterize the nuclear proliferation domain, as also the culpability of many responsible nations. The world is on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era.

Many nations are still advocating new rationales for the retention of nuclear weapons and developing new types of weapons. The USA, UK and France have initiated programmes to revitalize their nuclear complexes. The USA will be replacing existing warheads with ‘Reliable Replacement Warheads’ of comparable capability that would have advanced safety and security features, be less sensitive to manufacturing tolerances or to ageing of materials, and be certifiable without nuclear testing. New policies and doctrines have advocated use of nuclear weapons against hardened targets or in the event of unforeseen military developments. The US Nuclear Posture Review clearly views the nuclear weapons as more usable than has been the case so far. If nuclear and non nuclear weapons are clubbed together and seen as one continuum, it is bound to further blur the nuclear and conventional thresholds.

### **How Useful and Effective are Nuclear Weapons in the New Strategic Environment ?**

Nuclear deterrence may have prevented major powers from resorting to nuclear exchange. But now it is becoming increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective in the lower and middle part of the armed conflicts spectrum. Nuclear umbrellas, as statistics indicate, have encouraged more proxy, low intensity and asymmetric wars, in which more lives have been lost than in World War 1 and 2 combined.

Nuclear deterrence is a rational, perception-based theory which does not take into its ambit 'irrational' acts or behaviour of individuals or non-democratic nations. It is of no use in the global war against terrorism and asymmetric wars. During the Cold War, and for many years after that, many leaders believed that nations armed with nuclear weapons and deterrence do not go to war with each other. This too has been proved wrong. The Soviet Union and China went to war in 1969. India and Pakistan went to war in 1999. I have personal experience of that. There was considerable nuclear brandishing from the other side. Despite a proven military aggression on India, our forces were not allowed by the political leadership to go across the boundary or the Line of Control. It went much against public sentiment and martial logic, but our military accepted its necessity. The Kargil war showed that nuclear capability can increase the chances of a proxy and a limited conventional war. Such a conflict, without responsible politico-military overview, can escalate to the level of weapons of mass destruction. In 2003, the USA and its coalition partners attacked Iraq when they strongly suspected that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. What if Iraq did possess 'ready to fire' weapons of mass destruction!

Nuclear weapons, we all know, create serious problems of weapons security, safety during movement, and storage. Recently, the Federation of American Scientists posted an internet report by the US Air Force. The report stated that most European air force bases, which house several hundred US thermonuclear bombs in six NATO countries, are failing to meet the safety requirements to protect the weapons. The bases often fall short of US Defence Department standards with fences, lighting and buildings in need of repair, and security guards often lacking sufficient training and experience.

We may have reduced the nuclear arsenals considerably, but the quality and destructive capacity of the remnants has increased substantially. As a soldier, I say with conviction that modern nuclear weapons may have deterrent capabilities but they are not usable in a war. They make the war neither fightable nor winnable. Nuclear stability

rests on deterrence, but not on their military utilization. Perhaps, a commission of retired strategic force commanders of the nuclear weapon states, if constituted, would be in a more convincing position to tell the world about the military utility of nuclear weapons in the prevailing and future geo-political and strategic environment.

### **So How Do We Sustain the New Momentum?**

Like in the 1960s and 80s, we have yet another opportunity, perhaps the last, to reconsider nuclear disarmament before the number and the spread gets out of the hand of responsible governments. We must compliment William Perry, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz and Sam Nunn, who have taken the initiative and seized the opportunity to rekindle the vision of a nuclear free world.

India supports any call for a nuclear free world. In the conference on “World Free of Nuclear Weapons” held in New Delhi, and in the UN General Assembly on September 26, 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reiterated India’s continued commitment to nuclear disarmament that is global, universal and non discriminatory, with complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame.

The World Court judgement in July 1996 had ruled: “There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith to conclusive negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all aspects under strict international controls.” Abolishing nuclear weapons would require that we abjure their new developments and de-legitimize them. We should also introduce much greater degree of restraint and responsibility in nuclear policies and practices. Our first target should be the nuclear doctrines. These doctrines carry aggressive messages and latent threats. These should be gradually de-fanged. For example, nuclear doctrines by all nuclear nations can be made transparent and changed to reduce reliance on the ‘first use’; ‘Non use’ against non nuclear weapon states and keeping credible minimum deterrent only should be made mandatory, as we have done in India. We should attempt to keep nuclear and conventional doctrines apart, with

threshold for the use of nuclear weapons defined as clearly as possible. Aggressive nuclear doctrines need to be eschewed.

In the current geo-politics, it would be almost impossible for any political leader to order the use of nuclear weapons pre-emptively against a state or non-state targets. A 'no first use' pledge by all nuclear weapons states will help in the de-legitimization process. It would be a meaningful confidence building measure. By itself, it will not obviate incidents of nuclear terrorism. But making proliferation to non-state actors an international crime would diminish the risk that allows proliferation networks to spread to states with lax enforcement.

So long as large ready-to-launch nuclear arsenals exist, the risk that these weapons will one day be detonated remains high. Nuclear weapons in a de-alerted state are less susceptible to accidental use. Many nuclear states have already adopted such measures. If all nuclear powers adopt this measure, it would give more warning and decision-making time, and could help in de-legitimizing these weapons later. Yet another measure that could be considered is an all party agreement for the non-deployment of weapons on foreign lands. The range and quality of missiles allows 'extended deterrence' without having to deploy them on foreign lands. It is not the firing but decision making that takes time.

We need to devise transparency measures that could be effective whenever there is a political will to enhance nuclear transparency at regional and/or global levels. With tongue in cheek, may I suggest that we take a look at the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Indian and Pakistani leaders at the Lahore Summit in 1999? In that Memorandum, both countries agreed to pursue a list of confidence-building measures. These included measures aimed specifically at nuclear risk reduction. The enumerated measures indicated the common ground between India and Pakistan, and highlighted areas where future agreements may be possible at bilateral and regional levels.

I have already suggested a commission of retired strategic force commanders of nuclear weapon states. If their analysis can establish the sheer irrationality of fighting a war with nuclear weapons, it would enhance prospects of de-legitimising nuclear weapons and their eventual elimination.

One can foresee many challenges too, such as: (a) verification regime for reductions of arsenal and accounting of nuclear material; (b) dual use dilemma of nuclear energy, CTBT without any conditions, and verifiable FMCT for all and; (c) ownership, control, and location of such facilities for international or multinational control of fuel cycles. All this will require non-discriminatory political framework and assurances in the form of regional peace and cooperative security agreements.

### **Recommendations: Priority Steps for 2009**

Let me list ten priority steps for the year 2009.

- An unequivocal commitment of all nuclear weapon states to the goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons, to be followed by:
- Negotiation for a Nuclear Weapons Convention prohibiting any further developments, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and for their destruction, leading to the global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons. Set a deadline for that goal.
- A legally-binding agreement on the non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.
- Nuclear doctrines to be made transparent by all nuclear nations, and kept separate from conventional doctrines so that thresholds are not easily blurred.
- Agreement by nuclear weapon states on ‘no brandishing’ and ‘no-first-use’ of nuclear weapons.

- Agreement among nuclear states to keep nuclear weapons in a de-alerted state to reduce the risk of their accidental use.
- Consideration of nuclear risk reduction CBMs at bilateral/regional levels to establish common grounds on which future agreements may be possible.
- Constitution of a commission of retired strategic force commanders of nuclear weapon states to analyze military utility of nuclear weapons in the prevailing and futuristic geo-political and geo-strategic environment.
- Starting negotiations for an agreement on non-deployment of weapons on foreign lands.
- Promotion of civilian control over nuclear weapons, the non-military are likely to regard these weapons only as instruments of deterrence and will be more sensitive to the need of safe custody.

## **Conclusion**

India has an impeccable record on non-proliferation and a long-standing commitment to nuclear disarmament that is global, universal and non-discriminatory. We believe that the pursuit of such a goal will enhance not only our own security, but the security of all countries. But that objective cannot be achieved through half measures, ambiguous approaches and without a deadline. Half-measures have been tried before. We know where they lead to, or -- more accurately-- where they don't lead to. While we seize the moment, there is a long way to go. The way ahead will depend upon high level investment in political and diplomatic capital by the international community, particularly on the part of major nuclear weapons states.