



## **THE NUCLEAR DOCTRINE AND THE BJP**

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On 07 March 2014, a national political party, the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) released its manifesto for the 2014 general election, currently being held in India. While the document has listed a large number of social, economic and external relations policies, it is the paragraph on the 'Independent Strategic Nuclear Programme' that has caused the most debate in the international arena. The text that has generated this debates states that it would:

- Study in detail India's nuclear doctrine, and revise and update it, to make it relevant to challenges of current times.
- Maintain a credible minimum deterrent that is in tune with changing geostatic realities.
- Invest in India's indigenous Thorium Technology Programme.<sup>i</sup>

In 1998, the National Democratic Alliance led government, of which this political party was the principle member, conducted a series of nuclear tests. The government also commenced the 'No First Use Policy' (NFU) of India. Given these circumstance it is now being assumed that India's NFU policy is under threat. While it is understandable that it has generated opinions; however, it would be presumptuous to come to the conclusion that India would be abandoning its NFU policy for a particular or any political party..

The idea of NFU in South Asia is primarily associated with India. India's Draft Nuclear Doctrine, issued by the National Security Council's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) in August 1999, states that India will have a "retaliation only" policy of nuclear use and therefore that India will "not be the first to

initiate a nuclear strike, but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail” (Clause 2.3 & 2.4 of the Draft).<sup>ii</sup> “The fundamental purpose of Indian nuclear weapons is to deter the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons by any State or entity against India and its forces. It also states that India will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states (Clause 2.5 of the Draft).<sup>iii</sup>

India’s NFU policy helps increase stability in the region. India shares its borders with China and Pakistan- two nuclear armed States, it has fought conventional weapons wars with both and has boundary/territorial disputes that it is trying to resolve with each of the two countries. Skirmishes on the two borders are a constant for the Indian Armed Forces, despite interactions between the armed forces. Tensions remain particularly high on the Pakistan border and comparatively less on the China border. The policy of ‘First Use’ has very little military utility but many problems. It puts too much pressure on the country, militarily and politically, to stay in a state of continuous alert, thus increasing safety concerns. It requires the establishment of stable and structured command centre to ensure no accidental use of nuclear weapons. However, the most distinct disadvantage of the policy is that no amount of threat would be able to ‘justify’ the use of nuclear weapons by the State.<sup>iv</sup>

India’s NFU policy reduces the possibility of use of nuclear weapons by other nuclear armed States. It also helps enhance India’s status as a ‘responsible State’, helping it generate diplomatic support for its stand on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It is this status and its non-proliferation record that has helped India sign civil nuclear cooperation agreements with other countries.

It has to be understood that any change in India’s NFU status would be debated by the parliament. The government would also seek views from the Indian strategic community, the armed forces, policymakers and scientists. It would be changed only after discussions on the advantages and disadvantages to this amendment in policy have been understood. It is highly unlikely that the purpose of India’s nuclear weapons (for deterrence) and the advantage it enjoys as NFU State would change when a new government is sworn in.

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India has time and again stated its commitment to the policy of restraint but clarity on India's nuclear doctrine, with revisions would be a welcome step. India needs to follow a timely appraisal of its nuclear doctrine to ensure effective policies for new developments. The draft document of the doctrine was released in August 1999 and in January 2003 minor revisions were made to it.<sup>v</sup> In such a situation updating the document, keeping in mind present geopolitical situations, should not be viewed as an 'abandonment of NFU'<sup>vi</sup>. It would ensure that neighbours recognise India's threat perceptions and steps that it would take to counter these threats. It would help in removing ambiguity, thereby reducing tensions.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) or Indian Council of World Affairs)*

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<sup>i</sup> Bhartiya Janta Party, "Election Manifesto 2014", Accessed on 11 April 2014, <http://bjpelectionmanifesto.com/pdf/manifesto2014.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Kanti Bajpai, " ", Accessed on 11 April 2014, <http://www.pugwash.org/reports/nw/bajpai.htm#anchor4>

<sup>iii</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine", Accessed on 11 April 2007,

<sup>iv</sup> Author's interpretation of presentation made by Dr Manpreet Sethi at IDSA Seminar titled, 'A Nuclear Weapons Free World: From Conception to Reality' 02-03 April 2014, IDSA, New Delhi.

<sup>v</sup> Prime Minister's Office, "Cabinet Committee On Security Reviews Progress In Operationalising India's Nuclear Doctrine", Accessed on 11 April 2014, <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/lreng/lyr2003/rjan2003/04012003/r040120033.html>

<sup>vi</sup> The International New York Times, "A risk to India's Nuclear Doctrine", Accessed on 11 April 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/10/opinion/a-risk-to-indias-nuclear-doctrine.html?hpw&rref=opinion&r=0>