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THE HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE AND INDIA

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The 2015 NPT Review Conference ended without approving a final document mainly due to the major differences on building a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.¹ However, the significant outcome is the reinvigorated focus on the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons”, and the associated push to negotiate a legally-binding instrument prohibiting the weapons by the Humanitarian Initiative, reflecting an unfolding paradigm shift in the global nuclear disarmament discourse.

Unrelenting Efforts

The Humanitarian Initiative – comprising a group of states and civil society organisations – insisted incorporation of the concerns regarding the impact of nuclear weapons use in the 2010 NPT RevCon Final Document which the 188 NPT States Parties adopted by consensus. It affirms the need to make “special efforts to establish the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.”² More importantly, it highlighted the legal gap with regard to outlawing nuclear weapons, unlike the two other WMDs – Chemical and Biological weapons. The 2015 NPT RevCon is equally marked by the Initiative’s proactive campaign, during which “over 100 states had endorsed the humanitarian pledge, committing to work for a new legally binding instrument for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons”.³

The Initiative’s unrelenting effort during the last five years has made its presence felt in the global arena. In May 2012, sixteen NPT States Parties submitted a joint statement at the first session of the preparatory committee to the 2015 NPT Review Conference.⁴ In



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October 2012, thirty-five countries joined a similar statement delivered to the 1st Committee of the UNGA.⁵ In April 2013, at the second session of the PrepCom to the 2015 NPT RevCon, a total of 80 states supported another joint statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. In October 2013, at the UNGA 1st Committee meeting, 125 states joined yet a similar statement.⁶ Three international conferences – March 2013 in Oslo, February 2014 in Nayarit, and December 2014 in Vienna – were attended by a host of countries and numerous civil society organizations to explore the humanitarian and environmental impacts of a nuclear weapon detonation, taking a look at existing international law relevant to this issue. At the end of the 2015 Conference, 159 states have endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge.⁷ The nuclear weapons states now cannot stop this momentum from transforming into a Convention in future to ban nuclear weapons, and that is “the real outcome” of NPT Review Conferences.⁸

The Foremost Votary

Though a non-NPT member state possessing nuclear weapons, India participated in all the three Humanitarian Initiative conferences and expressed its support for any effort towards progressive delegitimization of nuclear weapons. For India, this emerging momentum “is not a new concern”. Since the inception of the global mad race for nuclear weapons, India has remained a votary of disarmament. In 1988 India’s former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi proposed for an Action Plan for elimination of all nuclear weapons in three stages starting from 1988 to 2010. This was viewed not realistic and attainable by the global community then. In the UN General Assembly First Committee, India has sponsored for a number of years resolution which give expression to some of the concerns being discussed in the Humanitarian Initiative. Many countries those are now part of the Initiative have repeatedly discarded India’s resolutions as unrealistic for reasons that are difficult to understand.⁹



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“India has had a very uncomfortable relationship with nuclear weapons”.¹⁰ Partly owing to regional security situation and partly because of failure in global nuclear disarmament efforts India finally went for nuclear weapons. However, the very first sentence of India’s draft nuclear doctrine says “the use of nuclear weapons in particular as well as other WMD constitutes the gravest threat to humanity and to peace and stability in the international system. ... Unlike the other two categories of WMD, biological and chemical weapons which have been outlawed by international treaties, NW remain instruments for national and collective security ...”¹¹ It further says that a “global verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament is a national security objective. India shall continue its efforts to achieve the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world at an early date”.¹²

However, there is a philosophical divide between the Indian approach to nuclear disarmament and the rest of the world. India is advocating for a time bound and progressive nuclear disarmament process. As a necessary first step, all nuclear weapon states should go for a legally binding global NFU treaty with the universal realisation that nuclear weapons are not useful weapons. This should be corroborated by universal delegitimization of them through a global convention similar to the delegitimization of chemical and biological weapons process.

India has adhered to a policy of credible minimum deterrence based on a NFU posture, but it is prepared to convert these doctrinal commitments “into bilateral or multilateral legally binding arrangements”.¹³ India’s former Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh in his Inaugural Address in a conference in New Delhi categorically said “If all states possessing nuclear weapons recognise that this is so and are prepared to declare it, we can quickly move to the establishment of a global no-first-use norm. In many ways, this can open the way to gradual reductions and, finally, elimination through a Nuclear Weapons Convention. ... It would also require political measures to ensure that stability is maintained as the level of nuclear arsenals approaches zero.”¹⁴



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Whether the Humanitarian Initiative would ultimately lead to such a stage is a matter of conjecture. If the world community is determined to discard nuclear weapons, it has to address first, as India views, the thriving “gap between advocacy and commitment, between word and action that has long stymied international efforts to build a genuine global movement in favour of nuclear disarmament.”¹⁵

(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])

End Notes

¹ “UN Chief Expresses Disappointment at 2015 NPT Review Conference”, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/24/c_134264606.htm, May 24, 2015.

² “2015 NPT Review Conference Briefing Book”, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2015/2015-npt-briefing-book.pdf>, p. 6.

³ Beatrice Fihn, “The Real Outcome”, <http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/the-real-outcome/>, May 23, 2015.

⁴ Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Dimension of Nuclear Disarmament, by Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Holy See, Egypt, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Switzerland, First Session of the PrepCom for the 2015 RevCon of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2013), available at: www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom12/statements/2May_IHL.pdf

⁵ Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Dimension of Nuclear Disarmament, 67th session of the UNGA First Committee (22 October 2012), www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmamentfora/1com/1com12/statements/22Oct_Switzerland.pdf

⁶ Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, delivered by Ambassador Dell Higgie of New Zealand, 68th session of the UNGA First Committee (21 October 2013), www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com13/statements/21Oct_Joint.pdf

⁷ “Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons”, http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2015/statements/pdf/humanitarian_en.pdf

⁸ Fihn, n. 3.

⁹ Statement by Dr Suhel Ajaz Khan, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of India, Vienna and Head of the Indian Delegation to the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 8-9 December 2014.

¹⁰ Rajesh Rajagopalan, “India’s Nuclear Policy”, http://www.nids.go.jp/english/event/symposium/pdf/2009/e_06.pdf

¹¹ “Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine”, <http://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?18916/Draft+Report+of+National+Security+Advisory+Board+on+Indian+Nuclear+Doctrine>

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Khan, n. 8.

¹⁴ “Inaugural Address by Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India on A Nuclear Weapon-Free World: From Conception to Reality”, <http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/InauguralAddressShriManmohanSingh.html>

¹⁵ Khan, n. 8.