

# TOWARDS A NUCLEAR WEAPON FREE WORLD: INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

SWARAN SINGH

Starting from the four former US senior officials writing articles proposing a nuclear weapon free world in the *Wall Street Journal* in January 2007, a series of global initiatives have sustained the groundswell on this theme around the world. A number of initiatives in this direction include the Oslo Conference of February 2008, the London Dialogue in March 2008, an Experts' Roundtable in Berlin in June 2008, the setting up in September 2008 jointly by Australia and Japan of an International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, then in December 2008, over 100 political, military, business and civic leaders from across the globe launching the Global Zero initiative in Paris followed closely by President Obama's speech in Prague in April 2009, his chairing of the UN Security Council on September 24, 2009, that passed Resolution 1887 and then his Nuclear Security Summit in April 2010. All these marked the backdrop of the 8<sup>th</sup> Review Conference of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that was held in New York during May 3-28 and which managed to adopt a consensus final document calling for initiating the process to a convention on nuclear weapons ban.

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\* Prof **Swaran Singh** is Professor for Diplomacy and Disarmament at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This paper was presented at an International Conference hosted jointly by Australian National University and China Institute of Contemporary International Relations on "Exploring the Contours of Sino-Australian Security Cooperation in as Transnational Regional Context," held at Canberra (Australia) during April 21-23, 2010.

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As regards India, it sees this groundswell as a vindication of its dream though it also remains very conscious of the need for an early commitment by all the nuclear weapons powers.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the year 2010 holds very special significance with regards to India's search for a Nuclear Weapon Free World (NFWF). According to the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan—that was presented by India's Prime Minister to the Third UN Special Session on Disarmament on June 9, 1988—we would have achieved an NFWF before the end of this year.<sup>2</sup> Sure, this Action Plan was neither the first nor last of its kind but it does represent an important milestone in India's sustained interest in nuclear disarmament and, at least from the Indian perspective, is recognised as an important watershed in the evolution of both global as also national cumulative wisdom toward towards building an NFWF. China had similarly proposed for a world nuclear weapons convention on the occasion of its first nuclear tests in October 1964 and the Chinese policy-makers and scholars have also continued to show interest in nuclear disarmament.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, we are today debating an NFWF in the backdrop of another major transformation wherein this campaign for an NFWF is led this time by none other than the United States. This is also the first time in the history of the nuclear age that none of the major powers seems to oppose these initiatives towards the NFWF, which has allowed them to gather some momentum in

1. Laxminarayan Ramdas, "Abolition of Nuclear Weapons: Political Apathy and a Possible Way Ahead", in David Krieger, ed., *The Challenge of Abolishing Nuclear Weapons* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), p. 21; also Robert Green, "Nuclear Deterrence Scam Blocking Progress to a Safer World", *The Huffington Post*, June 8, 2010, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-green/nuclear-deterrence-scam-b\\_b\\_603157.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-green/nuclear-deterrence-scam-b_b_603157.html)
2. This Action Plan is formally known as "Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear Weapons Free and Non-Violent World Order" and is listed as Annexure 2 in Manpreet Sethi, ed., *Towards a Nuclear Weapons Free World* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2009), pp. 151-156. To locate it in the history of several such proposals, see Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Sort History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 185.
3. Shen Dingli, "Toward a Nuclear Weapons Free World: A Chinese Perspective," (Sydney: Lowy Institute *Perspectives*, November 2009), p.6. He says, "While such an objective of global zero is commendable, it will not be effective unless coupled with reductions in conventional threats and an improvement in global security that obviates the need for deterrence."

various parts of the world. It is for generating this unprecedented and expanding commitment for an NFWF that President Barack Obama has already been conferred the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009, and as result of his continued efforts in building consensus amongst world leaders, the groundswell has been heartening though the NFWF as yet remains a seriously contested proposition.

#### THE NEW GROUNDSWELL FOR SURE

At the very outset, it is President Obama's immediate backdrop that makes his successive proclamations – among these are his Prague speech of April 5, 2009, the UN Security Council Resolution 1887 of September 24, 2009 and his Nuclear Security Summit of April 12-13, 2010, in Washington – such a refreshing, convincing, even inspiring aspiration. Obama's departure on matters

nuclear becomes especially significant given his predecessor's track-record of abandoning and defying arms control treaties; especially his vision about "revitalising" nuclear forces and taking "anticipatory action" (read preemptive strike) that was outlined respectively in the George Bush Jr Administration's *Nuclear Posture Review* and *National Security Strategy* of 2001. In comparison, the Obama *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) of April 2010 seeks to provide negative security guarantees to all Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS), promising that in no circumstances will the US use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against any of the NPT-signatory NNWs. At the least, such professions by the US should discourage the NNWS from aspiring to have nuclear weapons and, in turn, create the necessary atmospherics for the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) to begin reducing their dependence on nuclear weapons.

This tectonic shift towards nuclear disarmament had begun with the collapse of the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s and had witnessed pronouncements about the expected "peace dividend" for the rest of the

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world. As early as in 1985, at their Geneva Summit, Gorbachev and Reagan had announced, “A nuclear cannot be won and should never be fought”.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the threats of a nuclear Armageddon had come to an end. Even the US-Soviet detente of the early 1970s that had produced a series of arms control treaties did not generate such pious aspirations. This brief period of confusion and idealism of the early 1990s, with the US as the sole surviving superpower in the lead, was followed by the unconditional and indefinite extension of the NPT in May 1995. As a result, while most states pledged to abstain from nuclear weapons, the NPT-endorsed five NWS could now ensure world peace based on their time-tested nuclear deterrence.<sup>5</sup> The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and possibly the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) were expected to seal this arrangement forever.

Of course, all this was easier said than done. The enormous military establishments built during the Cold War years – including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – now faced a spectre of their swords turning into ploughshares. The search for finding a new enemy had already begun. For the mere reason that most of the smaller conflicts had been ignored or pushed under the carpet during the Cold War confrontation, the post-Cold War period heralded the rise of ethno-nationalism and asymmetric intra-state violence, resulting in cascading episodes of ethnic cleansing, from Bosnia, Cambodia to Rwanda, compelling the US to lead the Coalition of the Willing into a Desert Storm Operation. The Persian Gulf War was to see US forces in Iraq till almost the end of the 1990s and they were back again from the year 2003. This trend was in tune with the shifting focus from East-West to North-South hyphenation, making threshold rogue states and their so-called illegitimate aspirations for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) the new buzzword in nuclear parlance. Finally, 9/11 produced a much needed enemy – transnational terrorism – that was worth the attention of the great powers and one that ensured, even if briefly, the continued relevance of the nuclear paradigms of the Cold War years.

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4. Mario Esteban Carranza, *South Asian Security and International Nuclear Order: Creating a Robust Indo-Pakistani Nuclear Arms Control Regime* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), p. 158.

5. Michael Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons: Principles, Problems, Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 80.

But soon, this spectre of terrorism and rogue states was eroding the efficacy of conventional theologies on nuclear deterrence and non-proliferation. The inevitably expanding numbers of new States with Nuclear Weapons (SNW) and, after the implosion of the A. Q. Khan network in October 2004, the increasingly credible threats of WMD falling into the hands of terrorist outfits, were to push the dominant discourse to rethink and revisit its formulations.<sup>6</sup> Unlike daring yet rational rogue states, terrorists would have no compunction, no incentives and no option to use their nuclear assets in the old fashioned escalation control deterrence matrix. Terrorists are not likely to develop their own nuclear arsenals and, given their extreme mobility, they would prefer to use, rather than lose, their nuclear access. It was this new reality that was to make the United States' hard-core conservative, realist, former high-ranking and experienced four officials begin publishing a series of joint annual articles in *The Wall Street Journal* from January 2007 propagating unilateral initiatives, arguing that the time for developing an NFWF had come.<sup>7</sup>

This seemingly yet realist sentiment had immediate echoes across European friends and allies. In June 2008, a widely publicised editorial was written by four former British Secretaries of Defence and Foreign Affairs – Douglas Hurd, Malcolm Rifkind, David Owen and George Robertson – advocating drastic reductions (though not unilateral) and lowering of the salience of nuclear weapons in national security strategies. In January 2009, four prominent retired German politicians – Helmut Schmidt, Richard von Weizsacker, Egon Bahr and Hans-Dietrich Genscher – supported similar calls for action by Moscow and Washington to promote nuclear disarmament.<sup>8</sup> In June 2008, again, the Prime Ministers of Australia and Japan announced the setting up of a bilateral International Commission on Nuclear Non-

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6. David Albright, *Peddling Peril: How the Secret Nuclear Trade Arms America's Enemies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 32.

7. George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2007; George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "Toward a Nuclear-Free World" *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2008; George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "How to Protect Our Nuclear Deterrent: Maintaining Confidence in Our Nuclear Arsenal is Necessary as the Number of Weapons Goes Down", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 2010.

8. *SIPRI Year Book 2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 409.

Proliferation and Disarmament that submitted its extensive report titled *Elimination of Nuclear Threats* in November 2009. Many more similar pieces were written, speeches made and conferences held elsewhere.

### THE IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

This groundswell, initiated by the four senior US officials, had certainly stirred up the debate amongst academics, policy-makers and strategists around the world yet it would have stayed just that had it not been reciprocated by the 2008 US Presidential candidate Barack Hussein Obama who was to later make history as he took over as the 44<sup>th</sup> yet first black President in US history, which further strengthened the sense of this being an epoch-making time for our world. With “change” as his byword, he has so far not succumbed to the doomsday soothsayers though his Administration has continued with several of his predecessor’s global military engagements, military and nuclear projects, as also exposed his being circumscribed and failing to deliver on promises like ratification of the CTBT by the US Senate and starting FMCT negotiations. But his search for evolving an NFWF has continued to muddle through various hiccups.

Seen in the backdrop of the US having been reluctant to talk of on NFWF and even abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and several other international regimes, including the anti-personnel landmine ban, Kyoto Protocol etc., President Obama does represent a convincingly new vision. It is this backdrop that makes Obama’s Prague speech of April 5, 2009 being viewed as a “radical vision” with “emphasis on the moral responsibility of the US for a world without nuclear weapons, in the framework of which the legal following up on the START-1 and SORT agreements, as well as the hastened American ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), is only the first albeit important step.”<sup>9</sup> But most important was President Obama chairing the UN Security Council session in September 2009 and getting all the five NWS to agree to a breakthrough resolution committing

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9. Nik Hynek, “Continuity and Change in the US Foreign and Security Policy with the Accession of President Obama” (Prague: Institute of International Relations, *Policy Paper*, August 2009), p. 6; Rajiv Nayan, “The Nuclear Agenda of the Obama Administration”, *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi), vol. 33, issue 5, September 2009, pp. 623-628.

themselves to “...create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in a way that promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all.”<sup>10</sup>

The *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) – a process that began in the Clinton years – has also seen an interesting evolution with Obama’s becoming known for underlining the reduced role of nuclear weapons.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the US and Russia managed to sign their post-START-1 nuclear agreement on April 8, 2010, effecting substantial reductions in their nuclear stockpiles. This was followed by Obama’s Nuclear Security Summit that was (a) attended by high-profile delegates from 47 countries, including heads of state and government from 37 nations; and (b) which reached a consensus joint communiqué and a work plan underlining that nuclear terrorism was the most serious threat to the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. As part of this new enthusiasm, Ukraine pledged to surrender all its remaining nuclear fissile materials by the year 2012 and Canada promised to return at least a substantial part of spent fuel to the US before 2018. Now where does India stand in this new momentum for nuclear disarmament and an NWFW?

*Prima facie*, in spite of initial misgivings from both sides, Obama has developed an unusual chemistry with India’s Prime Minister. Both have had successive meetings in various global and bilateral forums and in their last meeting at the Nuclear Security Summit, India’s Foreign Secretary was reported quoting Obama, saying that “there was no country in the world where the opportunities for a strong, strategic partnership are greater and

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10. *UN Security Council Resolution 1887*, S/RS/1887, September 24, 2009, at <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/September/20090924173226ihecuer0.5509411.html>

11. For details, see Martin Butcher, Obama’s Nuclear Posture Review, *BASIC Getting to Zero Special Briefing* (London: Basic, June 25, 2009), pp. 1-14.



more important to him personally or to the United States, than that with India.”<sup>12</sup> The years of George Bush Jr had witnessed India being transformed from a target to a partner in nuclear non-proliferation. And after a year of diplomatic engagement, India finds itself on the same page even with the Obama Administration and this is especially true when it comes to matters nuclear. With the signing of their reprocessing agreement in March 2010, their partnership, including their working together for an NWFN, has been both streamlined and reinforced.<sup>13</sup> To cite from their Joint Statement issued during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s November 2009 visit to Washington DC, both sides had underlined their “shared vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and pledged to work together, as leaders of responsible states with advanced nuclear technology.”<sup>14</sup> Never before have global circumstances been so favourable to India’s disarmament policy.

### INDIA’S ETHOS, TRADITIONS, LEGACIES

The Indian elite sees India as having made a “pioneering contribution... in the quest for nuclear disarmament... stood by the belief that the best guarantee for India’s security as indeed for the security of the world at large was a world free of all nuclear weapons.”<sup>15</sup> The recent revival of interest in the subject, they say, only highlights the continuing relevance of India’s vision and proposals. According to a senior leader in the government, this requires (a) binding commitment by all nations; (b) demonstration of good faith through a tangible progress; and (c) reorganisation of doctrines and institutions to sustain a nuclear weapon free world.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as early as in 1948, India had tabled a resolution at the UN General Assembly that noted the then UN Atomic Energy Commission’s proposal for the control

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12. Raj Chengappa, “Obama-Manmohan Chemistry: The Peacenik and the Flying Sikh”, *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), April 14, 2010.

13. Swaran Singh, “On the Same Page”, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), April 14, 2010, p. 12.

14. Joint Statement by President Obama, Indian Prime Minister Singh, November 24, 2009; accessed on April 16, 2010 at <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/November/20091125115540eafas0.3806574.html>

15. Inder Kumar Gujral, *Viewpoint: Civilization, Democracy and Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2004), p. 24.

16. Pranab Mukherjee, “Asian Security in the Twenty-first Century: Key Challenges”, in N.S. Sisodia, V. Krishnappa and Priyanka Singh, eds., *Proliferation and Emerging Nuclear Order in the Twenty-first Century*, (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2009), p. 16.



of atomic energy “...for peaceful purposes and for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons.”<sup>17</sup> Scholars repeatedly cite examples of Nehru’s call for a “Standstill Agreement” in April 1954 and for a Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), India’s role at the Eighteen-Member Disarmament Committee (ENDC), its co-sponsorship for a non-discriminatory treaty on non-proliferation in 1965, for a global treaty on no-first use in 1978, for a nuclear weapon free world in 1982 and then for a nuclear weapon free and non-violent world in 1988.

Indian scholars also cite India’s civilisational ethos and culture privileging peace and traditions from Buddhism to India’s peaceful national liberation movement. There is also increasing belief that the excessive peace preaching by India’s founding fathers was not driven exclusively by the desire to seek a high moral standing but also as the most pragmatic position possible, given India’s leverages and limitations of that time. But the fact that these pragmatic policies were inspired by faith in non-violence and commitment to peace remains writ large in numerous narratives on the genesis and evolution of India’s nuclear disarmament policy. The most inspiring influence on Nehru who guided India’s foreign policy almost from the early 1930s till his death in 1964, was Gandhiji. Gandhiji held a strong conviction that “the moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the [nuclear] bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bombs, as violence cannot be destroyed by counter-violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence.”<sup>18</sup>

The India National Congress’ foreign policy spokesperson from the late 1930s and India’s Prime Minister and Foreign Minister from 1947 till 1964, Nehru had the most profound influence in defining the broad vision of India’s nuclear disarmament policies and postures. As early as in 1940 (when Italian Enrico Fermi was still working on achieving in 1942 a self-sustaining fission in Chicago University), in a confidential note penned for the inner councils of the Indian National Congress, young Jawaharlal Nehru

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17. Arundhati Ghose, “Negotiation of the CTBT: India’s Security Concerns and Nuclear Disarmemnt”, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 51, 1997.

18. Daniel A. Dombrowski, “Gandhi, Sainthood, and Nuclear Weapons”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 33, no. 4, October 1983.

wrote: "Both because of our adherence to the principle of non-violence and from practical considerations arising from our understanding of world events, we believe that complete disarmament of all nation-states should be aimed at and is, in fact, an urgent necessity if the world is not to be reduced to barbarism."<sup>19</sup> His numerous speeches professing commitment to never using nuclear science for evil purposes and his multiple high-profile disarmament initiatives remain only too well-recorded.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister whose tenure witnessed India's first nuclear test during May 1974 but, given the general tenor of national orientation of the Indian power elite, she chose to disappoint her dedicated scientific fraternity by calling it a Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE). She told the Indian Parliament, "This experiment was part of the research and development work which the Atomic Energy Commission has been carrying on in pursuance of our national objective of harnessing atomic energy for peaceful purposes." She further said: "No technology is evil in itself: it is the use that nations make of technology which determines its character. India does not accept the principle of apartheid in any matter and technology is no exception."<sup>20</sup> On her return to power in the early 1980s, she joined the high-visibility "Six-Nation-Five-Continent" initiative<sup>21</sup> where, starting from their first meeting on May 22, 1984, these heads of state and government from mid-ranking countries began to meet frequently, urging the international community to halt all testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, followed by reduction and elimination of nuclear forces.

Between Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi as two Prime Ministers from the Indian National Congress, there had been a brief interregnum of a Janata Party led government which had also tried to reorganise India's disarmament vision which was part of their debate on "genuine" non-alignment that sought to ensure equidistance from the two superpowers

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19. Mani Shankar Aiyar, "Towards a Nuclear Weapons Free and Non-Violent World Order", in Sethi, ed., n.2, pp. 19-20.

20. Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 360.

21. These countries included Argentina, Greece, India, Mexico, Sweden and Tanzania.

and was seen as an attempt to shift from Moscow to Washington. This period had witnessed a visit to India by President Jimmy Carter and a brief rethink on India's disarmament posture. On June 9, 1978, at the First UN Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSD), Prime Minister Morarji Desai had proposed a ban on nuclear weapon tests, this time as part of a proposed outline for nuclear disarmament. This tradition was to be sustained by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reiterating this proposal through a call dated June 11, 1982, to the Second UNSSD. This time, India's proposal included a call for a Convention on No-Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons, a freeze on the manufacture of nuclear weapons combined with a cut-off in the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes, and a test-ban treaty.<sup>22</sup> This was to be developed into a far more serious effort during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi who followed Indira Gandhi as India's Prime Minister from 1984.

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Indeed, no other Prime Minister of India had as short and as intense a contribution to nuclear disarmament as did Rajiv Gandhi. Young at the age of 40 to be Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi's tenure became known for a whole range of forward looking initiatives. Especially, his contributions to India's nuclear disarmament remain unusually out of proportion to his years in power. To begin with, he inherited the "Six-Nation" initiative of his mother and former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, that had begun in the year 1984. This picked up momentum during Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev's visit to India during November 1986 which is remembered for the signing of a 10-point declaration of principles for building a nuclear weapon free and non-violent world. The same formulation was repeated in Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 Action Plan to the UN which presented India's most detailed proposal on nuclear disarmament, ever made. Given his inspired idealism and futuristic vision, historians of nuclear disarmament have compared Rajiv with Jawaharlal Nehru, and his legacies continued

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22. N. D. Jayaprakash, "Non-Proliferation and the Challenge of Nuclear Disarmament", *Dissident Voice*, at <http://dissidentvoice.org/2010/05/non-proliferation-and-the-challenge-of-nuclear-disarmament/>

**Our leaders also realised that a nuclear weapon-free world would enhance not only India's security but also the security of all nations. That is why disarmament was, and continues to be, a major plank in our foreign policy.**

to be important as India celebrated 20 years of his Action Plan in 2008. However, negation of his vision by the great powers must have contributed to Rajiv Gandhi agreeing to the counter-view and allowing India's nuclear weapons programme to culminate in India trying for nuclear tests during August 1995 and to finally achieve that feat in May 1998.

Indeed, once it had conducted five nuclear tests on May 11 and 13, 1998, which India claimed to be nuclear weapons, several serious doubts were cast on India's nuclear disarmament credentials, especially its call for an NWFV. But once the heat and dust on India's nuclear explosions had settled,

the world began to see the nuanced articulation of India that insisted on how New Delhi's decision to exercise its nuclear option had not been an easy choice and that it did not even dent India's cardinal faith in nuclear disarmament. Again, several important pronouncements can be cited to prove the point. For instance, addressing the Indian Parliament on May 27, 1998, Prime Minister Vajpayee sought to put these questions at rest as he announced: "Our leaders also realised that a nuclear weapon-free world would enhance not only India's security but also the security of all nations. That is why disarmament was, and continues to be, a major plank in our foreign policy."<sup>23</sup> This commitment was clearly enacted as part of India's draft nuclear doctrine that was released on August 17, 1999. The draft doctrine made it amply clear that it is in the "absence of global nuclear disarmament [that] India's strategic interests require effective, credible nuclear deterrence" and that otherwise, "global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament is a national security objective." And it specifically underlines how "India shall continue its efforts to achieve the

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23. Suo Motu Statement by Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Parliament on May 27, 1998, accessed on April 16, 2010, at <http://www.indianembassy.org/pic/pm-parliament.htm>

goal of a nuclear weapon-free world at an early date.”<sup>24</sup> Successive speeches and policy documents can be cited to reinforce the point about the peace orientation of India’s nuclear policy formulations.

**Global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament is a national security objective.**

### INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

No doubt, mainstream India continues to show a leaning towards nuclear disarmament yet, in spite of celebrating and privileging peace, India does have its own share of maximalists and hawks who remain sceptical about this so-called vision for an NFWF. But often, even the hawks have found it difficult to negate the desirability of an NFWF. K. Subrahmanyam – the well-known strategic thinker from contemporary India – has been arguing in favour of a nuclear weapons convention from the early 1990s. For him, to argue that nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented is as puerile as arguing that biological, chemical and radiological weapons cannot be disinvented and, therefore, should not have been banned. Instead, he finds the answer in what he calls the “nuclear weapons cult” of the major powers that has ensured a “cartelised possession by few nations, and King Atom as the keeper of the peace in the industrialised world for the last 40 years.”<sup>25</sup> So the solution for him lies in delegitimising nuclear weapons and undermining their attraction as the currency of power in international relations.

Another well-known strategist, Jasjit Singh, whose team had organised in New Delhi a major international conference to celebrate 20 years of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan says: “As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their use by accident, miscalculation and/or intent can never be ruled out. As long as nuclear weapons exist with some countries, other countries would find a powerful incentive to acquire them. It is in this context

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24. *Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on India’s Nuclear Doctrine* (Embassy of India, Washington DC), accessed on April 16, 2010 at [http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/CTBT/nuclear\\_doctrine\\_aug\\_17\\_1999.html](http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/CTBT/nuclear_doctrine_aug_17_1999.html), para 2.1 and 8.1.

25. K. Subrahmanyam, “Eradicate the Nuclear Cult”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1987, pp. 38-39.

**Manpreet Sethi favours the approach of “progressively devaluing nuclear weapons and eventually delegitimising them.”**

that we find that a nuclear weapon free world... is actually extremely complex.”<sup>26</sup> To seek it through a conventional non-proliferation mindset, therefore, remains a non-starter at best. Among some of the challenges that it involves include (a) challenges of organising security without nuclear weapons; (b) reorganising discourses on both proliferation and deterrence that have undergone a transformation; and (c) managing a peaceful paradigm shift where security is no longer possible in the Westphalian system of competitive nation-states but makes cooperation amongst states an essential prerequisite. There is no military solution today, for instance, to environmental, energy and food security or even to transnational terrorism. So, the old deterrence or proliferation paradigms have little relevance to the new reality.

Amongst the younger group of scholars in nuclear matters, Dr Manpreet Sethi describes how the debate for an NFWF “always flounders on two basic issues – the desirability of achieving such a state; and the feasibility of doing so.”<sup>27</sup> Manpreet Sethi favours the approach of “progressively devaluing nuclear weapons and eventually delegitimising them.”<sup>28</sup> This is where the norm of ‘non-use’ is sought to be privileged and India has been talking of adopting a global No-First Use Convention. Other than its desirability – which remains relevant to the domain of advocacy – serious academic questions on the feasibility of an NFWF continue to be raised about whether it is possible to come about, given that (a) nuclear knowledge cannot be disinvented; (b) delinquent nations can cheat; (c) a non-nuclear world will be more prone to wars; and (e) the sheer technical and financial challenge of dismantling nuclear assets, disposing of fissile materials and creating transparency and safeguards, and how this tedious process will be

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26. Jasjit Singh, “The Third Nuclear Wave: Introductory Remarks to the New Delhi Conference”, in Sethi, ed., n.2, p. xiii.

27. Manpreet Sethi, “Approach to Nuclear Disarmament: Devalue to Discard”, in Sethi, ed., n.2, p. 85.

28. Ibid., p. 88.

too complex to achieve consensus. Above all, as past experience shows, countries that matter have been convinced and are even sceptical of the motivations of NFWF proponents. But it is in this backdrop of little interest shown by the major powers in the past that President Obama's continued efforts to take the lead in the NFWF campaign make such a convincing case and inspire cooperation by the major powers. And if anything, this only vindicates the validity of India's disarmament policy.

**An NFWF today seems to be a relatively convincing case of an idea whose time has come. But the challenge to its proponents remains, and is still robust.**

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, therefore, India's 1988 Action Plan that marked its continued commitment to an NFWF also remains an important determinant of India's current policies and postures. And here, what explains the "failure of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 Action Plan aimed at convincing the nuclear weapon states to achieve nuclear disarmament in a time-bound fashion" is that it was perhaps too early for the major powers to appreciate the NFWF vision in 1988 when the Cold War systems were collapsing like a house of cards yet their mindset remained entrenched in the comfort zone of their past.<sup>29</sup> The resemblance between the youth, idealism and ambitions of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and those of President Barack Obama is too stark to miss, except that an NFWF today seems to be a relatively convincing case of an idea whose time has come. But the challenge to its proponents remains, and is still robust. But it is in the wake of this rising groundswell that India sees for itself a responsibility (and opportunity) to be the catalyst in strengthening initiatives towards building an NFWF.

It is also true that while the power of 'ideas' like an NFWF is being emphasised, the idea of 'power' refuses to cave in. So the NFWF vision turning into reality seems to face friction with the 'currency of power'

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29. Brahma Chellaney, *Security: India's Future in the New Millennium* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999), p. 233; T. V. Paul, "The Systemic Bases of India's Challenge to the Global Nuclear Order", *The Nonproliferation Review*, Fall 1998, p. 6; also T. V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) see "Introduction", pp. 1-14.



proponents and their fusion betrays the circumspection of all these efforts for an NFWF. For instance, in spite of President Obama's continued drive to evolve a global consensus on an NFWF, he has conceded space to Pentagon hardliners. His NPR released on April 6, 2010, clearly "negates the idea of US unilateral nuclear disarmament. So does the President's increased budget to refurbish the ageing infrastructure of nuclear weapons and material-handling facilities."<sup>30</sup> There are still several opponents of this dream. They may have been subdued by the recent tide for nuclear disarmament, but this window of opportunity may not stay open indefinitely. This is what makes an NFWF an inspiring goal but also a formidable challenge for our generation, requiring not only efforts at the levels of great leaders but also at the level of opinion and policy-makers, scholars, and, especially, the strategic community.

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30. George Perkovich, "After Prague, What's Next for Arms Control?", *New York Times*, April 7, 2010, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/08/opinion/08iht-edperkovich.html>