

Living With India's Bomb: In Praise Of Indifference

Gaurav Kampani

Note: An updated version of this article appears in the Spring 2001 issue of *Orbis*

Table of Contents

(Click on titles to jump to heading. Click on headings to return to the table of contents.)

- **Introduction**
- **Why India Is Likely to Acquire An Operational Nuclear Capability**
- **Reconciliation With The Nonproliferation Regime?**
- **What Was Wrong With the Clinton Administration's Approach?**
- **The Case for Disaggregating Ties**
- **Conclusion**

Introduction

In the aftermath of India's May 1998 nuclear tests, two major policy challenges confront the US government and the global nonproliferation community. The first challenge relates to dealing with a *de facto* nuclear weapon state unfettered by regional arms control arrangements or the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The second challenge centers on the need to reduce nuclear risks and promote crisis stability in one of the most volatile regions of the world.

Tackling the first challenge is significant because the Indian tests and decision to field an operational nuclear deterrent violate the growing international norm against proliferation. India's quest for nuclear status is likely to set a precedent for other potential proliferators. More importantly, the manner in which the global nonproliferation community led by the United States manages the challenge posed by India's claims to nuclear status could either help repair the breach in the nonproliferation norm, or alternatively, invite future defections from the NPT leading to a breakdown of the regime.

The second challenge stems from the potential for nuclear weapons use in South Asia. Both India and Pakistan have organizational problems related to fledgling nuclear arsenals. They also share a common border and bitter historical rivalry, have very limited surveillance, and command, control, and communication systems, and are participants in a protracted and bloody low-intensity war over Kashmir.¹ Having fought four conventional wars in the last fifty years, the possibility of a fifth war leading to a nuclear exchange remains high.² Such an outcome would break the post-World War II taboo against nuclear weapons use, and "conventionalize" them.

The US foreign policy community is divided between nonproliferation purists and South Asia regional specialists. The purists would like the US government to take no steps that compromise the sanctity of the nonproliferation regime. South Asian regional specialists are more pragmatic and would prefer that the United States recognize the existing nuclear reality and proceed from there.³

The Clinton administration's post-May 1998 policy towards India straddled both approaches. The administration imposed economic and technological sanctions mandated by the Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act of 1994.⁴ Simultaneously, it began a high-level dialogue with

¹ For an excellent analysis of the difficulties stemming from the acquisition of limited nuclear capabilities, see Neil Joeck, "Maintaining Nuclear Stability in South Asia," *Adelphi Paper 312*, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997).

² Pakistan and India fought conventional wars in 1948, 1965, and 1971. The fourth is the limited conventional war that was fought along the northern part of the line of control in Kashmir between May and July 1999. See Jasjit Singh ed., *Kargil 1999: Pakistan's Fourth War for Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1999); and *From Surprise To Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report*, (New Delhi, Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1999).

³ The debate is best reflected in the Council on Foreign Relations' Independent Task Force Report, *After the Tests: US Policy Toward India and Pakistan*, (Sept. 1998), <http://www.foreignrelations.org>.

⁴ On May 13, 1998, President Clinton imposed economic and military sanctions on India under Section 102 of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA). See "Presidential Determination No. 98-22," May 13, 1998, White House, <http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/>; and "India Sanctions," May 13, 1998, White House,

New Delhi to exploit the post-Cold War convergence in Indo-US economic and political interests. Administration officials also informally began a process of disaggregating the nuclear and non-nuclear components of their India policy; the objective of this approach was to balance the US's commitment to global nonproliferation norms with its other regional interests in South Asia.⁵

On the nuclear front, the administration tried to find a common ground where India's nuclear ambitions could be reconciled with the US's global nonproliferation concerns. Recognizing that nuclear rollback was impossible, administration officials tried to achieve the more modest goal of corralling India's strategic capabilities. Their policy comprised four benchmarks: strategic restraint on weaponization and deployment of nuclear forces; India's accession to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); a South Asian moratorium on fissile material production pending the negotiation of a multilateral Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT); and strengthened export controls in nuclear and missile technologies.⁶

To achieve these limited nonproliferation goals, Washington embarked on the most comprehensive nuclear dialogue with New Delhi in the history of Indo-US relations. The administration also granted limited sanctions relief to encourage Indian leaders to comply with the nuclear benchmarks.⁷ But after ten rounds of negotiations between US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh, with the exception of some movement in the area of export controls, the Indo-US nuclear dialogue remains at an impasse. As a non-signatory to the NPT, India continues to insist on its right to deploy an operational minimal deterrent. It continues to balk at signing the

<http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/>. See also the testimony of US Undersecretary of Commerce for International Trade, David L. Aaron before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Hearings, "India-Pakistan Nuclear Proliferation," June 18, 1998, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/>.

⁵ See the testimony of US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Karl F. Inderfurth before the Subcommittee on Near East and South Asia of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 3, 1998, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/>; and Inderfurth's remarks at the Foreign Press Center in Washington DC, "US Relations with India and Pakistan After Nuclear Testing," June 26, 1998, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/>.

⁶ US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, "Dialogue, Democracy, and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia," Address at Conference on Diplomacy and Preventive Defense Co-sponsored by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict and the Stanford-Harvard Preventive Defense Project, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, Jan. 16, 1999, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/>.

⁷ In Oct. 1998, Congress gave the president authority to waive sanctions for one year under the India-Pakistan Relief Act of 1998. On Nov. 7, 1998, President Clinton eased some economic sanctions against India. See the statement by the Press Secretary, "Easing of Sanctions Against India and Pakistan," Nov. 7, 1998, White House, <http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/>; In Oct. 1999, Congress passed H.R. 2561, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2000. Section IX of the act gives the president authority to waive sanctions applied to India and Pakistan affecting nonmilitary programs, foreign assistance, commercial financing, and export-import financing. The president extended partial sanctions relief to India in Oct. 1999. In Dec. 1999, 51 Indian entities were removed from the US Bureau of Export Administration's export control sanctions list. See "Presidential Determination No. 2000-04," Oct. 27, 1999, White House, <http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/>; "Dual-Use Export Control Sanctions: India and Pakistan," Mar. 17, 2000, Bureau of Export Administration – US Department of Commerce, <http://www.bxa.doc.gov/>.

CTBT. And lastly, the Indian government has flatly ruled out a moratorium on fissile material production prior to the negotiation of the FMCT.⁸ Thus, the Clinton administration's policy of limited engagement has failed to achieve any of its nonproliferation objectives in India.

The reason for that failure is not far to seek. The Clinton administration failed to understand that New Delhi's nuclear weapons program is open-ended.⁹ After decades of fractious debate the Indian government has finally made up its mind to acquire an operational deterrent; the Indian government also hopes that India will eventually gain political recognition as a nuclear peer by other *de jure* nuclear weapon states. There is thus little common ground for reconciliation on nuclear issues between India and the United States. The US's position as one of the guardians of the nonproliferation norm and guarantor of the nonproliferation regime preclude it from recognizing another nuclear peer in the international system.

But the Clinton administration's policy of limited engagement did worse than reach this inevitable impasse. The process of informally disaggregating ties into nuclear and non-nuclear strands sent mixed signals to India's nuclear advocates. The latter misinterpreted the high-level attention accorded to New Delhi as indirect acknowledgement of the correctness of India's nuclear policy. Worse, during the course of negotiations, US officials committed the mistake of tacitly recognizing India's nuclear status. Tacit recognition without any reciprocal nuclear restraint on New Delhi's part emboldened Indian nuclear advocates to believe that if nuclear detonations and declaration of intent to acquire a minimum deterrent could elicit tacit recognition on Washington's part, an operational nuclear capability would eventually result in formal recognition by some future US administration. Rather than arresting proliferation in South Asia, the Clinton administration's policy ended up stoking India's nuclear ambitions, creating incentives for further vertical proliferation in the region.

Another course of action with a far greater chance of success is available to the new US administration. But its wisdom will not be readily apparent unless we first come to grips with the political and institutional dynamics propelling India's nuclear program.

⁸ See "Interview with Indian Minister of External Affairs: Jaswant Singh," Nov. 29, 1999, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>.

⁹ Ibid. Referring to the Indian government's decision to acquire a minimum deterrent, Singh explained, "...This 'minimum,' however, cannot be a fixed physical quantification; it is a dynamic concept but firmly rooted in the strategic environment, technological imperatives, and national security needs...the actual size, components, deployment, and employment of nuclear forces will be decided taking into account all these factors."

Why India Is Likely to Acquire An Operational Nuclear Capability

The Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party government (BJP) in India has made up its mind to build and deploy a minimum nuclear deterrent. The minimum, however, has not been defined and there is no urgency to do so. Meanwhile, the nuclear deterrent has acquired different meanings for the coalition of actors and institutions that are driving nuclear policy in New Delhi. The four principal constituents of this coalition are the Hindu right wing and conservative politicians; strategic analysts outside the government; civilian nuclear and defense scientists (often collectively described as the “strategic enclave”); and the armed services.

For Hindu right wing and conservative politicians, nuclear weapons mirror the growing muscularization of Hindu society; they are also the symbol of an increasingly assertive and resurgent India.¹⁰ For strategic analysts outside government, the decision in favor of an overt nuclear posture marks an end to nearly four decades of waffling on the subject. The decision also symbolizes the shift away from woolly-headed Nehruvian idealism to Realism in international relations.¹¹ For the civilian nuclear and defense scientists, weaponization is a feat of scientific, technological, and organizational excellence. It provides cover for their organizational failures in other areas and serves as a means to build coalitions with the politicians and the armed services.¹² And for the first time since independence in 1947, India’s armed services have found a place in the nuclear coalition. The armed services are concerned about potential nuclear threats from Pakistan and China; they are also anxious to manage India’s fledgling arsenal professionally.¹³ But more significantly, the armed services’ advocacy of nuclear weapons is fueled by inter-service competition and rivalry with the civilian bureaucracy, which has historically controlled access to India’s political leadership.¹⁴

¹⁰ Interview with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on India’s nuclear tests, May 15, 1998, *India Today*, <http://www.indianembassy.org/>.

¹¹ For example, see Amitabh Mattoo, “India’s Nuclear Policy in an Anarchic World,” in Amitabh Mattoo ed., *India’s Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond*, (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1999), pp.9-33; also see Jasjit Singh, “Why Nuclear Weapons,” in Jasjit Singh ed., *Nuclear India*, (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1998), pp.9-25.

¹² Itty Abraham, “Fetish, Secrecy, National Security,” in *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy, and the Postcolonial State*, (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp.155-166.

¹³ I have mainly relied on personal interviews and writings of retired military officers. Nevertheless, the services’ perspective can also be gleaned from statements made in the post-May 1998 period by sitting service chiefs. See “New Indian Army Chief to Prioritize Nuclear Tactics for Army,” Sept. 30, 2000, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>; also see “IAF Draws Up Nuclear Strategy,” Oct. 8, 2000, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>; Raja Menon, *A Nuclear Strategy for India*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2000), pp.122-283; Vijai K. Nair, “The Structure of an Indian Nuclear Deterrent,” in Amitabh Mattoo ed., *India’s Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond*, pp.65-107.

¹⁴ For a historical narrative of the civilian-military divide in postcolonial India see Stephen P. Rosen, “India and its Army after Independence,” *Societies and Military Power: India and Its Armies*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp.197-257.

The Indian government is now committed to acquiring an operational and visible nuclear capability. This is evident from the draft of India's nuclear doctrine, which was released in August 1999.¹⁵ Although public criticism forced the government to distance itself from some of the more ambitious proposals contained in the proposed draft, India's foreign minister has stated publicly that, "...India shall maintain a credible minimum nuclear deterrent and shall undertake all measures to ensure its credibility." Implicit in the emphasis on "credibility" is the assumption that an extant nuclear force will be usable and survivable, neither of which can be achieved without acquiring an operational capability.¹⁶

The abandonment of restraint signals the Vajpayee government's acceptance of the nuclear advocates' view that India's earlier adherence to "non-weaponized" deterrence was nothing more than a policy of strategic bluff. Nuclear advocates' in New Delhi had long argued that under the latter approach, India's nuclear capability was largely symbolic and existed only on paper. Worse, successive Indian governments did not opt for the non-weaponized approach after a careful deliberation of India's nuclear choices; rather, they blundered into accepting the *status quo* by default. They either did not think through the challenges of nuclear deterrence, or assumed that the mere possession of a few disassembled nuclear weapons would deter potential nuclear threats from Pakistan and China.¹⁷

Central to the above conclusion is the advocates' presumption that successful practice of nuclear deterrence requires: (a) the possession of operational nuclear forces; and (b) the demonstration of political will to use them. In the pre-1998 Indian case, both conditions were absent.¹⁸ Although India did possess air deliverable nuclear weapons in the pre-May 1998 period, until the advent of the BJP no Indian government ever publicly articulated a doctrine of nuclear use.¹⁹ Furthermore, the absence of a visible nuclear command-and-control system, constitutional protocols to guide leadership succession in the event of a successful decapitation strike, and post-nuclear exchange disaster management plans, provide indirect evidence that no Indian government seriously considered using nuclear weapons.²⁰ In an operational sense defined by the advocates, therefore, India's existential deterrent lacked credibility.

¹⁵ "Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine," Aug. 17, 1999, Discover India, <http://www.indiagov.org/govt/nucl.htm>; "Opening Remarks by National Security Adviser Mr. Brajesh Mishra at the Release of Draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine", Aug. 17, 1999, Discover India, <http://www.indiagov.org/govt/nucl.htm>.

¹⁶ Interview with Jaswant Singh, Nov. 29, 1999, *Hindu*.

¹⁷ Brahma Chellaney, "Nuclear Deterrent Posture," in Brahma Chellaney ed., *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1999), pp.141-151; Menon, "Pure Strategy and Technology," in *A Nuclear Strategy for India*, pp.171-173.

¹⁸ Chellaney, "Nuclear Deterrent Posture," in *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, pp.141-151.

¹⁹ India apparently began weaponizing air-deliverable nuclear weapons in 1989 and the Indian Air Force carried out toss-bombing maneuvers using a modified Mirage 2000 bomber as early as May 1994. See Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest To Be A Nuclear Power*, (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2000), pp.321-336, 382-384.

²⁰ K. Subrahmanyam, "Narasimha Strategy," Oct. 12, 1993, *Economic Times* (New Delhi); K. Subrahmanyam, "Articulating Our Nuclear Policy," June 15, 1994, *Economic Times* (New Delhi).

The Indian government's quest for an operational capability also embodies a challenge to the premise that a non-weaponized posture is far more crisis stable when compared to a deployed capability. The argument was made in the early 1990s that emerging nuclear powers such as India and Pakistan treated the demands of nuclear weapons very differently. They practiced nuclear deterrence by signaling their ability to assemble and deploy nuclear weapons quickly. Time gaps between actual assembly, deployment, and use of nuclear weapons not only gave both countries an opportunity to exercise restraint, but also provided maneuvering space for international mediation efforts to try to head off a potential nuclear war.²¹

However, new Indian thinking on the subject dismisses the non-weaponized-is-stable argument as a neo-orthodoxy. It is considered another example of an intellectual import from the West with minimal applicability in South Asia. Indian critics argue that the non-weaponized approach can only be stable during times of peace, when the nuclear threshold is at its highest and the need for stability minimal. Or perhaps, the non-weaponized model may have some relevance in the Middle East where Israel enjoys a nuclear monopoly. Conditions of peace and monopoly obviate the potential for political panic, hasty weaponization, rushed deployment, or nuclear use as the result of miscalculation or inadvertence. But absent these conditions, a nuclear capability held in recess has the potential to trigger the very instability that it is avowedly designed to prevent.²²

The emerging consensus in New Delhi is that India cannot anchor nuclear deterrence in a phantom capability. There is no special "third-way" or oriental wisdom to practicing nuclear deterrence. Nuclear weapons impose a logic of their own and in order for India to practice deterrence successfully, it must reproduce the strategic culture, technological systems, and some organizational approaches of the *de jure* nuclear weapon states.²³ In embracing the latter goal, the Indian government ironically has decided to adopt the retro-orthodoxy of classical nuclear deterrence theory from the 1960s.

²¹ George Perkovich, "A Nuclear Third Way in South Asia," *Foreign Policy* No.91, (Summer 1993), pp. 96-98.

²² Chellaney, "Nuclear Deterrent Posture," in *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, pp.141-151.

²³ Menon, "Pure Strategy and Technology," in *A Nuclear Strategy for India*, pp.171-173.

Reconciliation With The Nonproliferation Regime?

In the post-May 1998 period, the Clinton administration made corralling India's nuclear capabilities one of the key planks of its South Asian nuclear agenda. Administration officials tried to shepherd India into the nonproliferation regime by persuading it to institute tougher export-control laws and accept qualitative and quantitative caps on its nuclear capabilities.²⁴ However, these benchmarks remains unmet; it is now amply clear that with the exception of some convergence on export controls, New Delhi and Washington have widely divergent nonproliferation agendas.

There was, of course, never any realistic hope of persuading India to sign the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. Opposition to the NPT regime is now part of India's post-colonial identity. One of the principal drivers behind India's nuclear weaponization is the doctrine of equality in security and disarmament. In the context of nuclear proliferation this means that India would accept a nuclear rollback only as part of a globally negotiated, time-bound, and verifiable nuclear disarmament regime. Unless that happens, India will build, deploy, and maintain a minimal, survivable, and credible deterrent.²⁵ This doctrine is one of the principal reasons why India continues to reject the NPT. And it was partially in pursuit of this doctrine that India blasted its way into the nuclear club in 1974 and then reiterated its *de facto* nuclear status in May 1998.

Additionally, the Clinton administration tried to persuade India to sign the CTBT and accept a unilateral freeze on fissile material production. However, after ten rounds of negotiations, it is now evident that both goals remain more distant than ever. It is unlikely that any government in New Delhi will sign the CTBT in the near future. And even if it does, ratification and deposition of the instruments of ratification will be disaggregated, and most likely be a long and drawn-out process. Neither is India likely to accept unilateral caps on its fissile material production capabilities in the absence of a multilaterally negotiated FMCT.²⁶

In the immediate aftermath of the May 1998 tests, there were hopes that India would sign the CTBT. It was, after all, the fear of losing the option to test that supposedly had forced India to reject the CTBT in 1996.²⁷ The crash-test program removed that roadblock. The Vajpayee government also took a positive view of the CTBT. It declared a moratorium on further testing. India's foreign minister Jaswant Singh interpreted the moratorium to signify India's *de facto* adherence to the treaty; all that remained was India's formal signature, he claimed.²⁸ Prime Minister Vajpayee repeated these reassurances before the UN General

²⁴ Talbott, "Dialogue, Democracy, and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia," Jan. 16, 1999.

²⁵ Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 77, Number 5, (Sept./Oct. 1998), pp.41-52.

²⁶ Interview with Jaswant Singh, Nov. 29, 1999, *Hindu*.

²⁷ Gaurav Kampani, "The CTBT: Freezing India on the Nuclear Learning Curve," *Swords & Ploughshares*, Volume VI, Number 2, (Spring 1997), pp.97-108.

²⁸ "India's moratorium is de-facto acceptance of CTBT: Jaswant," Nov. 26, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>.

Assembly in September 1998 and 2000, when he said that India would not block the treaty's entry into force.²⁹

However, deep divisions among the government, the opposition parties, and the strategic community have slowed efforts in India to bring the CTBT into force. Moderates within and outside the government, led by the prime minister and his foreign minister, support the CTBT. They believe that India has access to three tested nuclear weapon designs. They also believe that Indian scientists have sufficient data to conduct subcritical and computer simulation experiments permitted under the CTBT. The latter have also made the case for the CTBT on grounds that it would end India's international isolation, improve Indo-US relations, and help in getting the remaining US economic and technological sanctions lifted.³⁰

Nevertheless, Indian opposition parties and skeptics in the strategic community are opposed to the CTBT on political and technical grounds. The Congress, India's main opposition party, has revived the ideological linkage between the CTBT and universal nuclear disarmament.³¹ The US Senate's rejection of the CTBT has also raised misgivings in India about the political efficacy of signing the treaty.³² But political reasons apart, several Indian strategic analysts believe that India probably needs to test again to verify and weaponize the design of the thermonuclear device. Informed by seismological data published by US scientists, the latter suspect that Indian scientists overstated the yield of the thermonuclear device, and that the thermonuclear test was a failure.³³ The skeptics are also unconvinced that Indian scientists would have been able to collect sufficient data from six tests to be able to conduct subcritical tests or run computer simulations with confidence. Pointing to the

²⁹ "Prime Minister's Address to the 53rd UN General Assembly," New York, Sept. 24, 1998, Ministry of External Affairs, <http://w3.meadev.gov.in/speeches/unspeech.htm>; "Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Address to the Millennium Summit at the United Nations," New York, Sept. 8, 2000, Ministry of External Affairs, <http://w3.meadev.gov.in/speeches/un-summit.htm>.

³⁰ "India will not obstruct CTBT coming into force, says Jaswant," Feb. 8, 1999, *Rediff on the Net*, <http://www.rediff.com>; C. Raja Mohan, "Towards a CTBT consensus," Nov. 9, 1999, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>; Kanti Bajpai, "Policy on CTBT," Dec. 16, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>; C. Raja Mohan, "An Unfolding Indo-US Waltz," Dec. 23, 1999, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>.

³¹ C. Raja Mohan, "Rajiv Gandhi and the CTBT," Feb. 4, 1999, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>; Muchkund Dubey, "Congress and India's Nuclear Policy- I&II, June 19&20, 2000, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>. Besides Congress, other political parties have also expressed opposition to the CTBT. See "Mulayam opposes signing of CTBT," Dec. 21, 1999, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>; "PM rejects Left demand for white paper on CTBT," Dec. 22, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>; "CPM urges PM not to sign CTBT in present form," Dec. 29, 1999, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>

³² Brahma Chellaney, "Caution on the CTBT," Nov. 3, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>

³³ Raj Chengappa, "Is India's H-Bomb a Dud?" Oct. 12, 1998, *India Today*, <http://www.india-today.com>; "Govt. Warned Against Signing CTBT in Haste," July 31, 2000, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>. For an overview of the controversy surrounding the yield of India's tests, see George Perkovich, "The Bombs That Roared," in *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1999), pp. 424-433.

examples of the United States and the former Soviet Union, the critics argue that both countries conducted numerous test-explosions before relying on lab tests.³⁴ At a minimum, therefore, they would like the government to form an independent committee to conduct a technical audit of the May 1998 tests.³⁵

The critics also object to the US Stockpile Stewardship Program. They fear that programs such as these will permit the more advanced nuclear weapon states to introduce modifications into existing nuclear weapon designs or design a new physics package with confidence.³⁶ On the other hand, countries such as India, which have limited testing experience and insufficient data, would find themselves locked into a position of nuclear inferiority in perpetuity.³⁷ Linked to this point are suspicions that the nuclear weapon states have signed secret protocols among themselves that permit a range of activities that violate the spirit if not the text of the CTBT.³⁸

However, the absence of a domestic consensus is not the sole reason behind the Indian government's hesitation in signing the CTBT. On its part, the BJP has not invested sufficient political capital to build a national consensus in favor of the CTBT; neither has it released information that would resolve some of the technical doubts that have put India's nuclear capabilities under a cloud. To the contrary, it has used the domestic debate as an excuse to delay action on the CTBT. The real reasons for the BJP's foot-dragging on the CTBT have as much to do with the absence of a domestic consensus as with the goal of driving a hard nuclear bargain with the United States.³⁹

In addition, the Indian government has ruled out unilateral caps on fissile material production.⁴⁰ This can mean two things. First, India might not have a sufficient quantity of fissile material that may be required for some internally derived government figure for the proposed minimal deterrent. And secondly, the Indian government might simply wish to hedge its nuclear bets and augment its fissile material stocks pending negotiation and

³⁴ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "The Question of More Tests," Dec. 17, 1999, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>.

³⁵ Arun Kumar Bhatt, "Peer Review of Pokhran Tests Sought," July 25, 2000, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>.

³⁶ Menon, "Pure Strategy and Technology," in *A Nuclear Strategy for India*, pp.142-145.

³⁷ Rajagopalan, "The Question of More Tests."

³⁸ Brahma Chellaney, "India's Attitude to Current Nuclear Order Ambivalent," Dec. 13, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>.

³⁹ "Brajesh Mishra Clears Misgivings Over CTBT," Sept. 14, 1998, *Rediff on the Net*, <http://www.rediff.com>; "India Cannot Be Pressured Into Signing CTBT," Nov. 26, 1999, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>; "No Plan to Sign the CTBT," Sept. 3, 2000, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>.

⁴⁰ Interview with Jaswant Singh, Nov. 29, 1999, *Hindu*.

ratification of a fissile material cut-off treaty at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.⁴¹ In addition, New Delhi has also adopted the ideological stance that it will only accept a ban as part of a multilaterally negotiated treaty that imposes equal political and legal obligations on all states and has agreed to participate in the FMCT negotiations only on this basis.

Export controls is the only area where the United States and India have found common ground. India has an effective system of export controls on sensitive nuclear, missile and related dual-use technologies. It also has a record of not exporting complete nuclear or missile weapon systems or related technologies in pursuit of political, economic, or other strategic objectives.⁴² India has reassured the United States that it would be willing to strengthen its export controls laws. Nevertheless, New Delhi harbors serious reservations about joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group or the Missile Technology Control Regime, when its own nuclear, space, and missile sectors remain a principal target of these regimes.⁴³

Thus the gulf that separates the United States and India on the nonproliferation regime remains wide. Despite the Indian foreign minister's publicly stated goal of reconciling India's national security objectives with the US's nonproliferation concerns,⁴⁴ New Delhi's real objective is to induce changes in US nonproliferation policy that would entail an exception for India's nuclear ambitions.

⁴¹ Ibid. In response to a question whether India was ready to join a moratorium on fissile material production for nuclear weapon purposes, Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh replied, "...we have, after the tests last year, announced our readiness to engage in multilateral negotiations in the CD [Conference on Disarmament] in Geneva... *this decision was taken after due consideration, which included an assessment of timeframes for negotiations and entry into force of an FMCT.* [emphasis added] At this stage, India cannot accept a voluntary moratorium on the production of fissile materials." For the best open-source estimate of India's fissile material stocks, see, David Albright, "India and Pakistan's Fissile Material and Nuclear Weapon Inventories," Oct. 11, 2000, Institute for Science and International Security, <http://www.isis-online.org/publications/southasia/stocks1000.html>

⁴² Barbara Leitch LePoer, "India-US Relations," *CRS Issue Brief* – IB93097, (Congressional Research Service, Sept. 29, 2000).

⁴³ Interview with Jaswant Singh, Nov. 29, 1999, *Hindu*.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

What Was Wrong With the Clinton Administration's Approach?

The Indian government is determined to acquire an operational deterrent. It would probably accept qualitative and quantitative caps on its nuclear weapons program when these no longer conflict with its self-perceived national security needs. And New Delhi eventually hopes to gain recognition as a *de jure* nuclear weapon state.

These goals directly contradict US policy, which is to institutionalize a regime of strategic restraint in South Asia, and persuade India to participate in the nonproliferation regime sans the NPT. Clinton administration officials had hoped that even partial achievement of those goals would have helped repair the breach in the nonproliferation norm. Their policy rested on the unstated assumptions that (a) the United States and by extension the nonproliferation regime would be better off achieving a partial success than being confronted with a total failure; (b) that the United States had few realistic options other than to recognize the existing nuclear reality in South Asia; (c) that nuclear rollback was impossible; and finally (d) that the United States had other significant political, economic, and security interests in the region that could not be held hostage to nonproliferation.⁴⁵

Mindful of these constraints, the Clinton administration recognized India's nuclear status tacitly.⁴⁶ Administration officials equivocated by ruling out formal recognition in public but by assuring New Delhi in private that subject to certain caps, the United States would be willing to tolerate India's *de facto* nuclear status.⁴⁷ However, equivocation turned out to be a premature and bad bargain. Tacit acceptance would have been a sound decision had India

⁴⁵ These assumptions are evident in the testimonies, public comments, speeches, interviews, and statements made by Clinton administration officials in the aftermath of the tests. See Karl F. Inderfurth's testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, "India-Pakistan Nuclear Proliferation," June 18, 1998, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/>; Inderfurth, "US Relations with India and Pakistan After Nuclear Testing," June 26, 1998. Strobe Talbott, "US Diplomacy in South Asia: A Progress Report," Address at the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, Nov. 12, 1998, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/>; Inderfurth, "Engaging South Asia," Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Washington DC, Oct. 6, 1999, US Department of State, http://www.state.gov.

⁴⁶ For example, after US Ambassador to India Richard Celeste publicly asked the Indian government to define and clarify what it meant by a minimum deterrent. Indian commentators seized on Celeste's acknowledgement of India's *de facto* nuclear status to press their case for weaponization and deployment. See O. P. Sabherwal, "US Curbs Unacceptable on Nuclear Research," Jan. 28, 2000, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>.

⁴⁷ In a November 1998 Strobe Talbott proclaimed that the United States "will not, concede, even by implication, that India and Pakistan have established themselves as nuclear weapon states under the NPT." Talbott, "US Diplomacy in South Asia: A Progress Report," Nov. 12, 1998. Yet, in Jan. 2000, Talbott told the *Hindu's* strategic affairs editor, "...we have never been shy about our view that universal adherence to the NPT is desirable. We are, of course, well aware of the view of the Indian government on the NPT and we recognize fully that only the Indian government has the sovereign right to make decisions on what sorts of weapons and force posture are necessary for the defense of India and Indian interests... we wish that India would foreswear nuclear weapons...but we both realize that this is not on in the foreseeable future. Thus we are seeking to reconcile to the greatest extent possible our nonproliferation concerns with India's appreciation of its security requirements." "Interview with Strobe Talbott," Jan. 14, 2000, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>

been amenable to some form of a nuclear compromise with the United States. Unfortunately, however, the opposite turned out to be the case.

India's nuclear weapons program is open-ended and there is no domestic basis for nuclear restraint, which explains why the Clinton administration failed to achieve any of its nonproliferation goals in South Asia. Without formally saying so, the administration modified US policy from nonproliferation to partial acceptance of selective proliferation in the international system. Further, the administration inadvertently created an intermediate category between the non-nuclear and nuclear weapon states -- nuclear possessor states.⁴⁸ By endorsing this category prematurely and without any reciprocal nuclear restraint on India's part, administration officials compromised US nonproliferation policy. They broke ranks with the nonproliferation faithful in the international community. The subtext of their message was that although the United States remains opposed in principle to proliferation, once a state crosses a certain threshold, its nuclear status becomes negotiable.⁴⁹

Defenders of the Clinton administration's approach could argue that the United States accepted this principle when it arrived at a nuclear understanding with Israel in the early 1970s. However the difference between the Indian and Israeli cases is that Israel agreed to abide by a sort of "don't ask don't tell" principle. It decided to keep its capabilities opaque and nuclear status shrouded in political ambiguity.⁵⁰ This softened the blow of Israeli proliferation. By contrast, India has adopted a policy that might be called "show and tell."⁵¹ Thus the costs in terms of damage to the nonproliferation regime are likely to be much higher. If the United States continues on the present course, it will subsequently have to accept India's further ascent up the nuclear ladder and its secondary impact on Pakistan's operationalization efforts. The net effect will be the loss of US credibility and the erosion of the nonproliferation norm.

⁴⁸ According to Talbott, "...Clinton administration does not expect either country to alter or constrain its defense programs simply because we have asked it to," but, "they can meet their security requirements as we have heard them define them without further testing nuclear weapons, without producing more fissile material, and without deploying nuclear-capable missiles." Strobe Talbott, "Dealing with the Bomb in South Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 78 No.2 (New York: Mar./Apr. 1999), p.120.

In Feb. 1999, Talbott summed up the goals of US diplomacy in a candid interview with *India Today*. In his words, "...what we are trying to do is to preserve the integrity of each government's deeply held positions and long-range strategy [emphasis added] while at the same time advance the cause which is also important for both governments...your prime minister on several occasions used the phrase 'credible minimum deterrence.' Now the two adjectives, credible and minimum, need to be reconciled. It needs to be credible in order to deter. [emphasis added] But it needs to be minimum in order not to provoke a devastatingly expensive and dangerous arms race. "Interview: Strobe Talbott," Feb. 15, 1999, *India Today*, <http://www.india-today.com/>.

⁴⁹ For an Indian understanding of post-May 1998 developments in Indo-US relations see Sanjukta Banerji Bhattacharya, "Of Vital Interests, Pokhran II and Indo-US Relations," in Anindyo J. Majumdar ed., *Nuclear India Into the New Millennium*, (New Delhi: Lancer's Books, 2000), pp.271-297.

⁵⁰ See Avner Cohen, *Israel And The Bomb*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ See Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement in Parliament on India's nuclear policy, May 27, 1998, Embassy of India, Washington DC, <http://www.indianembassy.org>.

Negative consequences on the nonproliferation regime apart, the administration's policy of tacit recognition has had a far worse impact on India's domestic nuclear debate. It has strengthened the hands of the nuclear hardliners in India and prepared the ground for further vertical proliferation in South Asia.⁵² The nuclear hardliners have exploited America's partial acceptance of India's nuclear status to attack the moderates and others who favor a return to some form of strategic restraint. Tacit recognition has led them to conclude that the United States appears willing to accept selective proliferation in the international system.⁵³ This in turn has fostered the belief that India's rapid acquisition of an operational nuclear capability would influence the domestic nonproliferation debate in Washington and help accelerate that trend.⁵⁴ Worse, the hardliners have misinterpreted the post-May 1998 nuclear dialogue with the Clinton administration as an indirect endorsement of the correctness of India's nuclear policy and evidence that the United States only engages in serious negotiations when proliferators follow tough words with action.⁵⁵

Finally, attempts to persuade India to sign the CTBT and accept a moratorium on fissile material production have created the impression in New Delhi that the premium attached to India's participation in the nonproliferation regime in Washington could be successfully leveraged to drive a hard nuclear bargain with the United States.⁵⁶ Similarly, Washington's insistence on the institution of stricter export controls has encouraged demands for the simultaneous lifting of technology embargoes on India's nuclear, space launch, and other industries with dual-use applications as a *quid pro quo* for good export control behavior.⁵⁷

⁵² For a review of the debate between Indian pragmatists and hardliners in the post-May 1998 period see Kanti Bajpai, "The Great Indian Debate," in Anindyo J. Majumdar ed., *Nuclear India into the New Millennium*, pp.47-74.

⁵³ Menon, "The Indian Nuclear Strategy and the International Environment," in *A Nuclear Strategy for India*, pp.303-307.

⁵⁴ This position is most clearly stated in the writings of former Indian foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey. Commenting on the May 1998 tests, Dubey wrote, "...the most likely scenario is that we would not be recognized as a nuclear weapon state until we become one. We would get recognition as a nuclear weapon state not through negotiation but by presenting the *fait accompli* of being such a state after the rest of the world has lived with this fact of life for a reasonable length of time. This may take anything between two or five years. Negotiations will come much lower down the road." Muchkund Dubey, "The World Nuclear Order and India," May 27, 1998, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>

⁵⁵ Although never stated directly, several hardliners have alluded to this belief indirectly. See Brahma Chellaney, "Woolly Diplomacy," May 5, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>; Brahma Chellaney, "US Friendly Policy," Dec. 15, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>; Chellaney, "Challenges to India's National Security," in *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, pp.572-592. Bharat Karnad, "Counterpoise to China: India as a Geostrategic Fulcrum," Sept. 6, 2000, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>; Bharat Karnad, "A Thermonuclear Deterrent," in Amitabh Mattoo ed., *India's Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond*, pp.147-149.

⁵⁶ Jasjit Singh, "A Negotiating Chip?" Dec. 25, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>.

⁵⁷ Chellaney, "US Friendly Policy," Dec. 15, 1999, *Hindustan Times*; Chellaney, "Challenges to India's National Security," in Brahma Chellaney ed., *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, pp.572-592. After the successful test of the Agni II in April 1999, Abdul Kalam, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government of India told *India Today* "...if the Government approves I would like to neutralise the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) that has tried but failed to throttle our programme. We have never supported proliferation. But other nations have used their capability like some kind of *brahmastra* (the "absolute

Thus, far from encouraging restraint, US policy of limited nuclear engagement has had the opposite effect. It has encouraged New Delhi to adopt a stance of nuclear recalcitrance in the hope that tough bargaining will produce higher pay-offs in the long term.⁵⁸

weapon” in Hindu mythology) to threaten us. *I would like to devalue missiles by selling the technology to many nations and break their stranglehold.* [emphasis added] Raj Chengappa, “Boom for Boom,” Apr. 26, 1999, *India Today*, <http://www.india-today.com>

⁵⁸ The *Hindu's* strategic affairs editor has dubbed the hardliners “nuclear Taliban.” See his critique of the hardliners’ approach to the nonproliferation regime, minimum deterrence, and the nuclear dialogue with the United States. C Raja Mohan, “India’s Nuclear Taliban,” Nov. 26, 1998, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>

The Case for Disaggregating Ties

In the short term, there is little that the United States can do to change the course of India's nuclear policy. After decades of fractious debate, the Indian government has finally made up its mind to seek an operational nuclear capability. India is a democracy and the BJP's decision enjoys popular support. The spotlight on India's hitherto secret nuclear program has politicized it in a manner that is unprecedented. This has made it difficult for the BJP, with its avowed commitment to an aggressive brand of nationalism and security, to make compromises that would contradict its publicly stated goals. With the exception of a few left-wing parties, the concept of a minimal deterrent also has the support of all the Indian mainstream opposition parties in parliament.⁵⁹ In addition, the proposed institutional changes in the government and incorporation of actors who were earlier denied a role in nuclear policy planning are likely to entrench the nuclear coalition and give it an influence unrivaled in post-independent India's history.⁶⁰

The United States has lost the nuclear debate with India. For three decades, successive US administrations have tried unsuccessfully to persuade, badger, and browbeat India into abandoning or at least limiting its nuclear option. Washington has employed political cajolery, technology embargoes, and economic sanctions in the pursuit of those objectives.⁶¹ The positive result of that policy is that India still faces formidable economic, technological, and organizational challenges in the path of attaining an operational nuclear capability. But the United States has nearly no leverage with India's vast nuclear coalition. The Indian power elite's belief in the prevalence of a global nuclear paradigm, coupled with India's growing technological autonomy, and higher economic growth rate have brought New Delhi closer to acquiring an operational deterrent.

The US's nonproliferation agenda also carries little credibility in New Delhi. The Indian government finds it impossible to reconcile the contradiction between the US's commitment to nonproliferation and the abiding belief of US policymakers in American exceptionalism and the efficacy of nuclear weapons. Indian policy makers attribute American concerns

⁵⁹ Even Congress, India's largest opposition party, which opposed the May 1998 tests, now supports the idea of a minimum deterrent. See "Sonia Backs NDA Stand on CTBT, Minimum Deterrence," Mar. 23, 2000, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>.

⁶⁰ The changes include the creation of a National Security Council and the position of a National Security Advisor to institutionalize the process of national security planning and decision-making. See "Six Member National Security Council Formed," Nov. 20, 1998, *Times of India* (New Delhi), <http://www.timesofindia.com>. The National Security Council's Advisory Board was first constituted in Dec. 1998 and included several nuclear hardliners. These hardliners played a key role in preparing India's controversial draft nuclear doctrine. The term of the advisory board ended in Dec. 1999 and a new board was constituted in June 2000. See Ninad D. Sheth, "National Security Council Advisory Board Term Ends," Dec. 24, 1999, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), <http://www.hindustantimes.com>; for a list of the current membership of the board see "National Security Council Advisory Board Reconstituted," June 1, 2000, *Hindu* (Chennai), <http://www.the-hindu.com>. On the government's plans to restructure civil-military relations see Amberish K. Diwanji, "Service HQ to be Integrated into the Defence Ministry," Jan. 5, 1999, *Rediff on the Net*, <http://www.rediff.com>

⁶¹ For a historical narrative of Indo-US nuclear relations see, Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1999).

about the dangers of a nuclear war in South Asia to an inherent racial bias.⁶² And the US's past record of selective policing of the nonproliferation regime has also made the task of persuading India to exercise strategic restraint extraordinarily difficult.

Indo-US nuclear differences are thus clearly irreconcilable in the short term. India's nuclear weapons program is open-ended; which explains why the Clinton administration's policy of tacit recognition has been such an abject failure. Far from arresting the proliferation challenge, it has had the perverse result of stoking New Delhi's nuclear ambitions further. In the wake of its failure, the United States now has three choices to deal with India's proliferation challenge: (a) containment; (b) formal recognition; and (c) calculated indifference.

A containment policy with the objective of a nuclear roll back would have been feasible had nonproliferation been the US's singular objective in South Asia. But the United States has other significant political, economic, and strategic interests in India, which cannot be deferred until the proliferation problem is resolved. Further, although containment might be the policy choice of the nonproliferation lobby, regional specialists who harbor misgivings about mono-issue approaches to foreign policy, would likely oppose it.⁶³ It would also find disfavor with US business groups keen to invest in the Indian market.⁶⁴ In addition, Indian-Americans are becoming an increasingly organized force in domestic US politics. So Congress would probably press the executive to adopt a more flexible policy towards India.⁶⁵

By the same token, the United States is likely to find it impossible to recognize India's nuclear status formally. Recognition through an amendment to the NPT carries the risk of jeopardizing the treaty-regime as a whole. Neither does the United States have any overwhelming strategic interests in South Asia to warrant making a nuclear exception by negotiating a bilateral treaty outside the NPT treaty-regime with India. That would create a horrible precedent for other nuclear aspirants and set the stage for defections from the nonproliferation treaty. Although India's emergence as a counterweight to China in Asia would be a welcome development, it need not come at the price of proliferation. China does not present an ideological, political, and military challenge to the United States of the scale posed by the former Soviet Union. Further, an Indian deterrent could cause China to expand

⁶² Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," pp.41-52.

⁶³ This is best highlighted in the "Open Letter to the President" issued by the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations on the eve of President Clinton's visit to South Asia in Mar. 2000. See, "Open letter to the President: Independent Task Force on U.S. Policy Toward South Asia," Mar. 2000, Co-Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution, <http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/haass/20000313.htm>. More recently, analysts have begun to make a case for an Indo-US strategic partnership in Asia. See Victor Gobarev, "India As a World Power: Changing Washington's Myopic Policy," *CATO Policy Analysis* No. 381, (Sept. 2000), <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-381es.html>

⁶⁴ For example, see the views expressed by the Executive Director of the US-India Business Council, Michael T. Clark, in the section "Additional and Dissenting views," in, *After the Tests: US Policy Towards India and Pakistan*, Sept. 1998.

⁶⁵ Robert Hathaway, "Confrontation and Retreat: The US Congress and the South Asian Nuclear Tests," *Arms Control Today*, Jan./Feb. 2000, <http://www.armscontrol.org/>.

its nuclear arsenal in the future. The continuing nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan would also provide China a context to continue with its policy of selling ballistic missiles to Pakistan.⁶⁶ The US's paramount national security goal should remain the prevention of further horizontal spread of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in the international system. Preventing the further nuclearization of the international system remains by far the most effective way of building a firewall against the potential conventionalization of nuclear weapons. It remains the best guarantee against any dilution in the norm against nuclear weapons use or preventing their potential diversion to and use by terrorists.

As containment and formal recognition constitute untenable policy choices, and the current policy of tacit recognition undermines the nonproliferation norm and encourages vertical proliferation in South Asia, the only practical alternative for the United States is to terminate the high-level nuclear dialogue with India. Washington should adopt a policy of nonchalance on nuclear issues to deflate New Delhi's exaggerated sense of self-importance. Although it might appear to be an irresponsible choice, caring or appearing to care too much for nonproliferation goals increases India's leverage and weakens the US's bargaining position. Further, in the absence of leverage with New Delhi to secure a favorable nonproliferation outcome, the United States should avoid doing anything that might legitimize or encourage India's nuclear coalition. Since India is likely to press ahead with its goal of acquiring an operational deterrent irrespective of US engagement or disengagement, the focus of US policy should shift towards insulating the nonproliferation regime from the potential aftershocks of India's nuclearization.

But despite the salience of nonproliferation issues, the United States should not ignore the larger task of expanding its ties with India. In the past, successive US administrations committed the error of holding Indo-US relations hostage to nonproliferation and the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union. This created great misgivings in New Delhi.⁶⁷ It unwittingly permitted India's nuclear coalition to hijack the proliferation debate and reference it in terms of a post-colonial national crusade against imperialism. The neglect of common concerns also prevented the rise of counter-coalitions that might have moderated the influence of the nuclear lobby in New Delhi. As a result of this past experience, Washington should now pay high-level attention to New Delhi, disaggregate the nuclear- and non-nuclear aspects of its India policy, and pursue the development of the latter independently of any differences on the proliferation issue. A more creative process of disaggregating and expanding ties will generate good will, build trust, and subtly expand US influence in India in the long term.

As part of this approach, the United States should also drop public opposition to India's nuclear weapons program. In the absence of substantial clout to affect the course of Indian nuclear decision making, such US hectoring only causes irritation in New Delhi and raises charges of a latent racial bias in US policy. Worse, it also has the unintended effect of

⁶⁶ See "Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions," July-Dec. 1999, US Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.cia.gov/>.

⁶⁷ For a historical narrative of Indo-US relations during the Cold War see Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States – 1941-1991*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1993).

discrediting the anti-nuclear lobbyists in India, as the convergence of the latter's views with the concerns of US policy makers inevitably results in their being tarred with the brush of anti-nationalism.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Chellaney, "Nuclear Deterrent Posture," in *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, pp.154-156.

Conclusion

India's power elites have adopted nuclearization as the vehicle for national self-expression. In India, nuclearization serves the goals of national identity construction; it enhances the legitimacy of the Indian state, satisfies competing institutional and bureaucratic interests, and alleviates perceived security concerns. But the important point to note is that India's national leaders have adopted nuclearization as a vehicle for self-expression because they believe in the prevalence of a global nuclear paradigm. Inevitably, therefore, notions of national self-esteem, security, and pride have become a function of India's ability or inability to reproduce that paradigm successfully.

It is not enough for India to have demonstrated its ability to explode nuclear weapons. India's goal is to acquire an operational nuclear capability. This quest is important to Indian leaders for two reasons. First, they view it as the key to attaining eventual recognition for India as a nuclear peer by other *de jure* nuclear weapon states. And secondly, they consider operationalization essential for nuclear deterrence. The goal of operationalization has thus made India's nuclear weapons program open-ended. This explains India's resistance to the Clinton administration's idea of strategic restraint; it also explains New Delhi's hesitancy in participating in the nonproliferation regime.

Hence the key questions before US policy makers are essentially this: Is there a possibility of a compromise where India's nuclear ambitions could be reconciled with US nonproliferation concerns? And in the event that a compromise becomes impossible, how should the United States deal with the challenge of the emergence of another nuclear weapon state in the international system?

It is now apparent that Indo-US nuclear differences are irreconcilable. The failure of the Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh dialogue is testimony to that. India harbors ambitions to become accepted as a nuclear weapon state, which is at odds with US policy objectives. The failure of the Clinton administration invariably brings us to the second question: how should the United States deal with the eventual emergence of another nuclear state in the international system? To an extent this question is premature, as India's nuclear deterrent, even two years after the nuclear tests, largely exists on paper. It will probably take at least a decade or more before India will be able to make the transition from the status of a nuclear possessor state with a "just-in-case" capability to that of a nuclear weapon state with a "ready-for-use" capability.⁶⁹ But US policy makers should not delay in thinking through the problem of crafting a long-term and sustainable approach of tackling India's nuclear challenge. The manner in which the United States handles India's challenge will affect the future success or failure of global nonproliferation efforts.

There are no obvious or easy answers to this second question. Washington's influence in New Delhi is marginal, and it has even less leverage over India's nuclear coalition. In the absence of either direct influence or effective policy choices to arrest India's march along the proliferation path, the best alternative recourse for the Bush administration would be to delay India's weaponization program and deny it the legitimacy that its leaders so covet.

⁶⁹ Neil Joeck, "Nuclear Relations in South Asia," in Joseph Cirincione ed., *Repairing The Regime: Preventing The Spread Of Weapons Of Mass Destruction*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.138.

Further, the focus of US policy should shift towards insulating the nonproliferation regime from the potential aftershocks of India's nuclearization.

To avoid legitimizing India's nuclear program, the United States should terminate the high-level nuclear dialogue with New Delhi. Washington should also adopt a policy of nonchalance or indifference on nuclear issues by formally disaggregating its India policy into nuclear- and non-nuclear components. This approach would reaffirm the US's commitment to global nonproliferation. The deepening of bilateral ties in areas where the United States and India have common concerns would also build trust and spawn diverse interest groups that in the long term would compete with the nuclear lobby for the attention of the Indian government. More significantly, it would disabuse the nuclear advocates of the belief that a nuclear India would be taken more seriously or eventually recognized as a nuclear peer.

Simultaneously, the Bush administration should continue its predecessor's policy of denying multilateral loans and maintaining the embargo on high-technology trade with India. Selective economic and technological sanctions should be used to reinforce the structural constraints on India's strategic weapons programs, with the objective of delaying them and forcing Indian leaders to accept restraints that they otherwise might be unwilling to negotiate. Washington's goal should be to force Indian decision makers to reappraise the costs and penalties of seeking an operational nuclear capability, dispel the belief of Indian hardliners that a further nuclear build up would yield positive benefits, and deter other potential proliferators who might wish to follow India's example.

However, ruling out formal recognition, sustained denial of multilateral loans for infrastructure development, and technology embargoes in high-tech sectors are short-term measures. These will at best restrict the scale and scope of New Delhi's nuclear ambitions. In the long term, therefore, US policy should attempt to institutionalize that restraint by addressing India's historic distrust of the global nonproliferation regime and delegitimizing nuclear weapons-related notions of national security. India's nuclear ambitions are ultimately anchored in the belief of its leaders in the prevalence of a nuclear weapons-centered global power hierarchy. Delegitimizing that belief system is the key to defeating India's nuclear challenge

India's nuclear challenge contains both dangers and opportunities. The danger stems from the precedent that would be set if India were to eventually become accepted as a nuclear peer. On the other hand, should the global nonproliferation community succeed in fending off India's nuclear challenge by denying it legitimacy and raising the economic and technological bar sufficiently high to retard New Delhi's efforts to acquire an operational capability, it might prevent the coming of a second nuclear age, one in which the "absolute weapon" would become a normal, ordinary part of world politics.