

Convenient Consensus and Serious Debate about Disarmament

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The United States discourse on disarmament commonly takes Article VI of the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) as its key reference point. The Indian discourse on disarmament, in contrast, routinely condemns the NPT as being a “discriminatory treaty” and takes Rajiv Gandhi’s 1988 “Action Plan” as its lodestar. This striking dissimilarity obscures a deeper and hidden similarity in approaches to nuclear disarmament taken by leading political authorities and strategic analysts in both nations: elites in both Washington and New Delhi have found it relatively easy to accept vague and lofty calls for nuclear weapons disarmament because such declarations were considered not to have much practical impact on actual nuclear weapons policy. This condition has clearly changed in the United States with the Obama Administration’s embrace of “a world free of nuclear weapons.” In the U.S., the convenient consensus in favor of promises to honor Article VI has turned into a serious (and healthy) debate about nuclear disarmament. Ironically, in India, where there is a long-standing political tradition supporting disarmament, it remains unclear whether such a serious debate on disarmament will occur and, if so, what its outcome would be.

The US Vision of Disarmament

Article VI of the NPT states in full: “Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”¹ Although the lack of specificity in Article VI is sometimes cited as a victory for those negotiators from the nuclear weapons states who did not want to link nuclear disarmament to non-proliferation, the negotiating history is more complicated and reveals that Article VI was actually a compromise between the U.S. and the USSR on the one side, and India and Sweden on the other. Indeed, as early as 1965, India, alongside other non-nuclear weapons state participants in the Conference on Disarmament, called for the inclusion of concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament in any future nonproliferation treaty regime. In the actual negotiations creating the NPT text, Sweden and India proposed to include a commitment to a number of “tangible steps,” including security assurances for non-nuclear weapons states, an end to nuclear testing, and a freeze on the production of nuclear weapons in the treaty.² The U.S. and the Soviet Union refused to allow such specific measures to be included in the final text of the NPT, but eventually accepted compromise language, proposed by Mexico, that committed all member states to “pursue negotiations in good faith” on nuclear disarmament and tied the NPT Review Conference

¹ “The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT),” 1968, available at http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/inventory/pdfs/npt.pdf.

² See Thomas Graham, Jr., “Origins and Implementation of Article VI,” 29 November 2007, presented at “P-5 Nuclear Doctrines and Article VI,” workshop held at Stanford University, available at http://cns.miis.edu/activities/071129_nprbriefing/media/071129_nprbriefing_graham_statement.pdf; Mohammed Shaker, *The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty*, Oceana Publications: New York, 1980; and George Bunn and Roland M. Timerbaev, “Nuclear Disarmament: How Much Have the Five Nuclear Powers Promised in the Nonproliferation Treaty?” *At the Nuclear Crossroads*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995.

process (including the vote after 25 years on whether to extend the treaty in perpetuity) to future nuclear disarmament progress. Without such a compromise, it is unlikely that the NPT would have come into existence.

India, of course, eventually rejected membership in the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state. This outcome was not, however, a foregone conclusion in the mid-1960s and occurred only after the Indian government seriously contemplated NPT membership and sought, but was unable (or unwilling) to negotiate security assurances or a joint nuclear guarantee from the US and the United Kingdom.³ (When in March 1966, Secretary of State Dean Rusk asked Prime Minister Indira Gandhi whether nuclear security guarantees would “require some sort of an alliance, and does India want an alliance?,” Foreign Secretary C. S. Jha replied that “the Indian Government had concluded that the U.S.- U.K guarantee would not work.”⁴) After the 1974 PNE test and the subsequent imposition of sanctions, the NPT increasingly became seen in New Delhi, not as a possible option for India that had been rejected, but rather as a symbol of global discrimination and thus a legitimate target for condemnation.

In the United States after 1968, the NPT and Article VI became an easy source of political consensus and every subsequent U.S. Presidents claimed to support the long-term goal of nuclear disarmament and asserted that his administration had a strong record in meeting its Article VI obligations. Even the George W. Bush Administration, which sought to develop a new “bunker buster” nuclear weapon and rejected the effort to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), claimed that it had worked in good faith

³ A.G. Noorani, “India’s Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 7 No. 7 (July 1967), pp. 490-502.

⁴ Gandhi-Rusk meeting, 29 March 1966, Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968, XXV, p. 601 as quoted in Dane E. Swango, *The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: Constrainer, Screener, or Enabler?* (Phd Dissertation, UCLA, 2009), p. 123.

toward nuclear disarmament.⁵ It is, of course, much easier to have a consensus in favor of statements about a nuclear disarmament objective when no one thinks that the plans are practical or likely to be implemented. Once disarmament appears on the agenda of real politics, however, – that that is appears as a plausible policy goal that requires concrete steps that entail costs, and not just a distant aspiration – then the convenient consensus can unravel.

That is exactly what has happened in the United States. For some American political leaders and analysts, Article VI was merely a sop to the governments of the non-nuclear weapons states, a “declaratory policy” statement that the US government (if these leaders or analysts had their way) had no intention to follow. Former CIA Director John Deutch in *Foreign Affairs*, for example, said that the U.S. was “unwise” “to commit under Article VI of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) ‘to pursue good-faith negotiations’ toward complete disarmament, a goal it has no intention of pursuing.”⁶ The well-known clarion call for a world free of nuclear weapons by the Gang of Four (George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn) legitimized a more serious discussion of nuclear disarmament, and exposed the fragility of the apparent consensus in favor of honoring our Article VI commitments.⁷ Nuclear disarmament opponents quickly came out of the closet. Former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Deutch responded to the Gang of Four op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* with a piece calling nuclear

⁵ Christopher Ford, “Debating Disarmament,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 14, no. 3 (November 2007): 401-428. For the contrary view, see Scott D. Sagan, “Good Faith and Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations,” in *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, ed. George Perkovich and James Acton, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

⁶ John Deutch, “A Nuclear Posture for Today,” *Foreign Affairs* (Jan/Feb 2005), p. 51.

⁷ See 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, p. A15 and Shultz, Perry, Kissinger, and Nunn, “Toward a Nuclear-Free World,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2008, p. A13.

disarmament a “fantasy,” writing of Article VI: “No one suggests abandoning the hope embodied in such a well-intentioned statement. However, hope is not a policy.”⁸ In a later interview, former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger went so far as to maintain that “the notion that we can abolish nuclear weapons reflects on a combination of American utopianism and American parochialism.”⁹ After Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize, in part for his embrace of the disarmament vision, the nuclear hawks were more than furious: *Time Magazine* even ran an essay calling for the Nobel committee to give the Bomb the next peace prize.¹⁰

Three important things have occurred in the United States, however, that make the ongoing disarmament debate a serious and sustained contribution to real policy decisions. First, President Obama has a long-standing personal commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament. Indeed, in 1983, when he was a senior at Columbia University, Obama wrote an article that condemned the pursuit of “first- versus second-strike capabilities” that “suit the military-industrial interests” and called instead for nuclear abolition.¹¹ Like Ronald Reagan, Barak Obama really does want steady movement toward a nuclear free world, even though he recognizes that the road is long and may not be possible “even in my lifetime.”

The second change that has occurred is that the Obama Administration clearly believes that progress on nuclear non-proliferation cannot be achieved in the absence of progress on nuclear disarmament. In the Bush Administration, officials believed that

⁸ Harold Brown and John Deutch, “The Nuclear Disarmament Fantasy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 2007.

⁹ Melanie Kirkpatrick, “Why We Don’t Want a Nuclear-Free World,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 July 2009, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124726489588925407.html>.

¹⁰ David von Drehle, “Want Peace? Give a Nuke the Nobel,” *Time Magazine*, October 11, 2009.

¹¹ William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, “Obama’s Youth Shaped His Nuclear-Free Vision,” *The New York Times*, 4 July 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/05/world/05nuclear.html>.

there was little, if any, link between US arsenal size or force posture and non-proliferation decisions made by non-nuclear weapons states.¹² Obama Administration officials, in contrast, argue that the linkage is strong, even if it is often indirect and hard to measure. The April 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review outlines this view most clearly: “By demonstrating that we take seriously our NPT obligation to pursue nuclear disarmament, we strengthen our ability to mobilize broad international support for the measures needed to reinforce the non-proliferation regime and secure nuclear materials worldwide.”¹³

This statement, however, is a hypothesis, not a fact, and it is worth asking what evidence exists to support or oppose it. Indeed, the third development that has made the current disarmament debate more consequential (and more promising) than those in the past is that, at least thus far, the Obama Administration has proved to be right in its assessment that progress in disarmament enables progress in non-proliferation. Let me cite three examples. First, there has been some progress toward the CTBT coming into force. Indeed, when Indonesia announced its decision to start to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in May 2010, Ambassador Marty M. Natalegawa said that Jakarta had taken note of the “serious effort” on the part of the current United States Administration in promote disarmament.¹⁴ Second, the May 2010 NPT Review Conference took place in a

¹² Frank Miller, “Disarmament and Deterrence: A Practitioner's View,” in George Perkovich and James Acton, (eds.) *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), pp. 149-155. It is also noteworthy that in 1995, Ambassador John Bolton struck out all references connecting nuclear disarmament with nuclear non-proliferation in an app. draft UN document. See “United States Amendments: Disarmament and Non-Proliferation,” submitted to the 2005 World Summit, 1 September 2005, available at <http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/761/us-proposed-amendments-disarmament-and-nonproliferation>.

¹³ “The United States Nuclear Posture Review,” U.S. Department of Defense, April 2010, p. 12, available at <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁴ “Indonesia to ratify UN-backed pact banning nuclear testing,” *UN News Centre*, 4 May 2010, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34592&Cr=nuclear&Cr1>.

much more cooperative atmosphere and was able to produce a final document encouraging states to sign the Additional Protocol, calling on states not in compliance with their treaty commitments to come into compliance, and noted “the need for further progress in diminishing the role of nuclear weapons” in all states national security doctrines. Finally, the successful efforts to get additional rounds of sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council can be credited, in part, to the new spirit of cooperation that has been created among the US and China and Russia, including the movement on arms control and disarmament discussions.

Clearly the debate will continue in Washington about which specific steps should be taken first on the long road toward a world free of nuclear weapons, but the salience of the objective has been greatly increased. The Obama Administration has indicated it will first pursue Senate ratification of the New START treaty and subsequently will seek ratification of the CTBT. The April 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) was also a cautious first step toward a major reduction in the role of nuclear weapons in US security policy. While the NPR did not endorse a full-scale No First Use doctrine it did state that the US “will work to establish condition under which such a policy could be safely adopted.”¹⁵ The NPR also pledged direct negative security assurances (NSAs) to non-nuclear states, but excluded Iran and North Korea from such commitments: “The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”¹⁶ This statement significantly limited the scope of the “calculated ambiguity” threats to use nuclear weapons against biological or chemical attacks, and

¹⁵ “The United States Nuclear Posture Review,” U.S. Department of Defense, April 2010, p. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid*

indeed, can be seen as a further inducement to the Tehran government to come back into compliance with the NPT with the promise that the U.S. would then not threaten nuclear attacks under any circumstances against Iran. Finally, the NPR announced the creation of “a comprehensive national research and development program to support continued progress toward a world free of nuclear weapons” including work on verification technologies.¹⁷

Disarmament Visions in India

Any outside observer of the prolonged internal Indian deliberations about nuclear testing or about the U.S.-India deal is acutely aware of how heated and serious strategic debates in New Delhi can be. But it is hard to avoid the impression that, as occurred for many years in the US regarding Article VI disarmament commitment, in India a convenient but shallow consensus exists to extol the virtues of 1988 Rajiv Gandhi plan and criticize the “discriminatory” NPT regime. For example, In February 2010, Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao discussed nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament at the International Institute for Strategic Studies:

You are well aware of India’s long-standing commitment to global, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament. As early as 1988, our then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi presented one of the most comprehensive proposals to achieve a nuclear weapon free world to the UN General Assembly. In 2006, India tabled a Working Paper on nuclear disarmament to the UNGA. We feel encouraged by some recent positive steps. President Obama’s administration has signaled US willingness to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in its nuclear strategy and to work towards a nuclear weapon free world. The renewed debate underway on this issue harmonizes with our long held positions.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, . vii.

¹⁸ Nirupama Rao, “Perspectives on Foreign Policy for a 21st Century India,” International Institute for Strategic Studies – Indian Ministry of External Affairs Dialogue, 22 February 2010, available at

Ambassador T.P. Sreenivasan claims that “the concept of a nuclear weapons free world is attributable to India” quoting Mahatma Gandhi on nonviolence and citing the 1988 Rajiv Gandhi plan: “India not only believes that “getting to zero” is possible, but it is the only country that has actually put forth a potential disarmament framework.”¹⁹

Indian experts’ long-standing hostility to the NPT has clearly not been abandoned as India has become accepted as a “responsible nuclear weapons state,” a hostility that produces extreme and unsupportable assessments about the NPT among even the best Indian strategic experts. For example, Sreenivasan writes that “the major disappointment of the [Obama April 2009] Prague Speech was that although the ultimate objective was laudable, the path suggested was the same old NPT path... Although discrimination would end with the attainment of the goal, the world in the long interim period would remain divided, with the haves accumulating more weapons and the have-nots feeling a sense of diminishing security.”²⁰ (In fact, India, Pakistan and possibly China appear likely to be increasing the size of their arsenals in the future, but the US, Russia, France and the UK are clearly not “accumulating more weapons.”) Harsh Pant has been dismissive of the non-proliferation impact of NPT, claiming that the treaty “was never sustainable and has had little, if any, effect on the pace of nuclear proliferation.”²¹ (In fact, there are many non-nuclear weapons state members of the NPT – including Germany, Japan, Sweden, Australia, and South Korea – who could develop nuclear weapons quickly and legally in the absence of the NPT.) Rajesh Rajagopalan claims that

<http://www.iiss.org/programmes/south-asia/conferences-and-seminars/iiss-mea-foreign-policy-dialogue/third-iiss-mea-dialogue/nirupama-rao-address/>.

¹⁹ T.P. Sreenivasan, “Bringing India’s Dream to Fruition,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vo. 33 No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 169-170

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 171.

²¹ Harsh Pant, “The NPT at 40: A Treaty Marked by Failures,” *Blognews* 24, July 9, 2008; available at <http://blognews24.libero.it/?p=26997>

there has been “no progress on nuclear disarmament in the four decades since that treaty [the NPT] came into force.”²² (In fact, to give just one example, the size of the US nuclear arsenal was reduced from 31,225 weapons to 5,113 weapons between 1967 and 2010.)

Rather than complain about the discriminatory nature of NPT, the Indian government should more publicly acknowledge that strengthening the treaty to place further constraints on proliferation is very much in its interests. Indeed, Indian support for such improvements in the broader NPT regime as the Additional Protocol and the IAEA fuel bank has started. Still, it would also be valuable for the Indian government to lead by example, especially on the subject of its own nuclear weapons posture. Here, however, the rhetorical calls for universal No-First Use doctrines need far more specificity and self-awareness to be seen as Indian leadership in the right direction.

The Indian discourse on disarmament instead commonly harkens back to virtues of the 1988 Rajiv Gandhi “action plan” which called for all states to eliminate their nuclear weapons by 2010, with “tangible” progress in the interim period, and called for an international convention to outlaw the use of nuclear weapons.”²³ Yet, the consensus support in India for the Gandhi plan in 1988, like the US consensus on Article VI in the late 1960s, was more apparent than real. As George Perkovich describes it: “These proposals (the Rajiv Gandhi plan) were too lofty to have a practical impact, particularly on the existing nuclear powers. Indeed, they almost certainly did not reflect even the

²² Rajesh Rajagopalan, “The Future of Nuclear Disarmament,” in V.R. Raghavan (ed.) *India and Global Nuclear Disarmament* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2010), p. 40.

²³ Rajiv Gandhi, “The Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon-Free and Non-Violent World Order,” Address to the Third Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 9 June 1988, reprinted in V.R. Raghavan (ed.) *India and Global Nuclear Disarmament* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2010), quote at p. 164..

views of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, or the nuclear establishment. Nuclear hawks in India went along because these initiatives had little chance of being effected and served to rally public opinion in much of the world against nuclear weapons states.”²⁴

More recently, the Indian representative to the 2008 UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva renewed the call for a convention outlawing the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons and, as an interim step, called for universal No First Use pledge by all existing nuclear weapons state.²⁵ The government statement, however, implied what Indian strategic analysts routinely, but incorrectly, assert: that India already has a No-First Use doctrine and that other states must follow suit to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their doctrines.²⁶ India’s 2003 nuclear doctrine statement, however, explicitly added a “calculated ambiguity” threat to use nuclear weapons first in the event of chemical or biological weapons use against India and included a threat to retaliate massively against a nuclear strike on Indian troops even if they are in combat inside Pakistan.²⁷ V.R. Raghavan and K. Subrahmanyam are among the very few Indian strategic thinkers who have drawn attention to the importance of the NFU caveats added

²⁴ George Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb: the Impact on Global Proliferation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p. 298.

²⁵ Statement by Mr. Hamid Ali Rao, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament,” presented at the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly, 8 October 2009, available at <http://www.un.int/india/2009/ind1606.pdf>.

²⁶ Manpreet Sethi asserts, for example, that “at present, only two countries – India and China – accept NFU. The latter, however, does not offer an unconditional NFU in contrast to the one spelt out by India that is clear and unambiguous.” Manpreet Sethi, “India and Global Nuclear Disarmament,” in V.R. Raghavan (ed.) *India and Global Nuclear Disarmament* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2010), p. 31, fn. 10.

²⁷ For an analysis of the origins of this doctrinal change see Scott D. Sagan “The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine,” in Scott D. Sagan (ed.) *Inside Nuclear South Asia* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 219-263.

in 2003.²⁸ It is heartening to note, in this regard, that the report of an April 2010 seminar on the US nuclear posture review at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, stated that “it has been over ten years since India’s nuclear doctrine was formulated, and it is time to review the objectionable parts.”²⁹ A major contribution that the Indian government could play as part of its commitment to work in good faith toward the elimination of nuclear weapons is to review seriously and in a transparent manner, its own nuclear weapons posture and to move back toward a more pure form of No First Use doctrine.

Conclusion: Inside the Club

When asked to join an exclusive club in Beverly Hills, Groucho Marx once quipped that he did not want to join any club that would have him as a member. I fear that while the Indian government has largely rejected the writings of Karl Marx, it sometimes still seems to follow Groucho’s guidance. For India’s traditional disdain for the NPT has led some to oppose fully joining the “nuclear club” that India has now finally been invited to join. The United States and India, however, need to work together, as responsible nuclear weapons states, to strengthen the broader NPT regime to prevent further proliferation and to promote momentum toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

²⁸ See V.R. Raghavan’s Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: Scope for India-U.S. Cooperation,” paper prepared for this workshop, p. 9 and K. Subrahmanyam’s response to my 2009 *Survival* article “The Case for No First Use: An Exchange,” *Survival*, vol. 51, no. 5 (November-December 2009), pp. 17-46.

²⁹ “2010 Nuclear Posture Review and the Nuclear Security Summit,” Seminar Report, *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 20 April 2010, available at <http://www.ipcs.org/seminar/india-the-world/2010-nuclear-posture-review-and-the-nuclear-security-summit-839.html> .

