

Regional Hegemonic Aspirations of India: A Review of Indian Nuclear Program

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Abstract

The anarchic international environment induces the phenomenon of self-help, based on this logic the persuasion of the ultimate weapons to meet the security anxiety is a divine right of the sovereign states. This logic has led to the insecurity of the rest of the states, which may retort in same fashion and ultimate upshot would be catastrophe. Constant development in Indian nuclear arsenals, sophistication of military technology and new military strategic doctrines are the key depictions of changing Indian strategic thinking in contemporary era as to get influence in the triangular strategic environment which prevails among India, China and Pakistan. This paper would aim to study the Indian regional hegemonic aspirations as a stride towards a global prominent power in light of her nuclear program developments from its evolution to apex.

Keywords: India; Pakistan; Hegemonic; CTBT; South Asia; Indo-US Deal; BMDs; deterrence

I. Introduction

Since the first military use of atomic weapons in 1945 by the United States in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki, at the last stage of the WW-II, the nuclear technology has been considered as a source of security and prestige in the world politics. Actually, with the passage of time, the traditional warfare and conventional weapons have given a way to the nuclear warhead to become a deterrent weapon in the global world. Whilst, the military power was associated with the nuclear weapons, this technology proliferated beyond the “nuclear-weapon states”. Nuclear tests were conducted by India, Pakistan, and North Korea. This is a matter of great concern as the growing nuclear club has certain implications for several regions in the contemporary world.

The South Asia has very strategic location and its strategic worth has been further materialized by the acquisition of nuclear technology by India and Pakistan. Even though, it has been declared by the both states that the weapons meant for deterrence not for use, this assertion does not undermine the severity of the case. The long history of mutual hostility and distrust has not only fuelled the arm race between the rivals but also has earned the alliances from the nuclear club. The triangular strategic milieu between India,

Pakistan and China along with the strategic location of the region has become imperative in the new world order.

In this given situation, Indo-US nuclear deal has raised many concerns for the regional players, China and Pakistan. The growing Indian interest in the nuclear technology and its prolonged and continued efforts to strengthen its nuclear program unveils its resolute ambitions to play a major role in the region. There are definite reasons to argue that the perpetual expansion in nuclear arsenals, the sophistication of military technology and the new military strategic doctrines are the key depictions of changing Indian strategic thinking in the contemporary era. In addition, the allocation of titanic funds for military built up and the acquisition of sophisticated weaponry from France, Israel, Russia and the US seems to suggest that Indian aspirations are more like a hegemonic power. Hence, it is quite relevant to examine how Indian nuclear program developments contribute to its regional hegemonic aspirations.

II. Evolution of Indian Nuclear Program

India made its first explosion in 1974 as Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) and termed it as “Smiling Buddha”. However, previously, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) had been established in 1945 for the basic research in this modern discipline (Matinuddin, 2002, p. 60). Dr.Homi J. Bhabha, who had established this research centre, successfully earned the support by lobbying with the ruling core to develop nuclear energy (Rajaan, 2005, p. 208). After the partition, Congress-led government of Jawaharlal Nehru launched an ambitious dual use, three stage nuclear program to exploit India’s abundant natural thorium reserves. Essentially, the program remained development oriented in this phase and the major objective was to establish a nuclear industry to produce electrical power. An atomic energy commission was established in 1948 to conduct the exploration for uranium ore. Subsequently, an atomic energy department was established in 1954 to administer the overall nuclear activities in India. In 1956, negotiations were to build the 40MW ‘Canadian-Indian Reactor, US’ (CIRUS) research reactor that was eventually completed(Matinuddin, 2002, p. 60). The CIRUS became functional at Bhabha atomic research centre in Trombay during 1960. Eventually, the first phase of Indian nuclear program ended with the culmination of first Indian nuclear plutonium reprocessing plant that became operational at this research centre in 1964.

The second phase of Indian nuclear program is characterised by a shift in its orientation from a development-oriented program to a strategic one. The Sino-Indian war in 1962 and the Pak-Indian war in 1965 played vital role in this paradigm shift in the Indian nuclear program. It has been reported that India remained busy in both accumulating the bomb’s material and research exploration. Indian parliament was informed that the government intends to conduct Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNEs) in 1971. Accordingly, India carried out her PNEs in May 1974 and this so called peaceful explosion was named as “Smiling Buddha” (Rajaan, 2005, p. 64).

Third phase covers the period between the peaceful nuclear test of 1974 and the nuclear tests of 1998. This phase explores how the efforts were made to complete the delayed projects and to improve the performance of nuclear reactors. The phase reached its apex in May 1998 with the formal declared nuclear tests by India. A series of tests

with the name of “Operation Shakti” was launched(FAS, 2002). The following table illustrates the test series in some detail.

Table No 1 Shakti Nuclear Test Series

Test	Device	Date	Yield (claimed)	Yield (reported)
---	Fission device	18 May 1974	12-15 Kiloton	4-6 Kiloton
Shakti 1	Thermonuclear device	11 May 1998	43-60 Kiloton	12-25 Kiloton
Shakti 2	Fission device	11 May 1998	12 Kiloton	??
Shakti 3	Low-yield device	11 May 1998	0.2 Kiloton	Low
Shakti 4	Low-yield device	13 May 1998	0.5 Kiloton	Low
Shakti 5	Low-yield device	13 May 1998	0.3 Kiloton	Low

(FAS, 2002).

In the Post-1998 era, Indian nuclear program has focused on defining her strategic orientation and developing her assets to meet her long term goals. The following sections of this paper would describe these developments thoroughly.

It is important to explore the change that took place in the nuclear policy and strategy of Indian authorities. The “smile” of Buddha in 1998 was quite different from its earlier “smile” of 1974. This time “the grin was much wider” and Indian had no worries about openly declaring itself a nuclear weapon state(Salik, 2009, p. 12). These nuclear tests were justified by the Indian Prime Minister in the following word:

“I have been deeply concerned at the deteriorating security environment, nuclear environment faced by India for some years past. We have an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapons state. At the hands of this bitter neighbour we have suffered three aggressions in the last 50 years” (Internet, Suo Motu Statement by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, 1998).

Apparently, this statement suggests that the basic motive of the Indian nuclear explosion was to keep the balance of power in the region intact. But, there are a number of factors and motivations that led India to go for a nuclear test. The primary motivation could be multiple historic evidences such as partition of the region transformed into India and Pakistan, unresolved Kashmir issue and three all out wars between India and Pakistan. Secondly, Chinese factor also motivated the Indian policy makers to go for the nuclear status. Sino-Indian war in 1962 can be a triggering event in this pursuit. Thirdly, the element of “Prestige” on the basis of her world’s principle civilization and desire to become a “Head Table” in international forums are the pure ambitions of Indian drift towards nuclear status, as Raj Ramanna quotes:

“There was never a discussion among us over whether we shouldn’t make the bomb. How to do it was more important? For us it was a matter of prestige that would justify our ancient past. The question of deterrence came much later. Also, as Indian scientists we were keen to show our Western counterparts, who thought little of us those days, that we too could do it.”(Nuclear Weapon Archive, 2001).

The notable factor is that how the Indian estimated to join nuclear club to pursue the regional cum global hegemonic aspirations and very soon it developed such

capabilities (Nuclear Weapon Archive, 2001). Actually, Indian policy pundits may have calculated that a two front hostility can best be addressed by the quantitative increase in nuclear weapons to maintain minimum credible deterrence. Though, India proclaims that she must defend her national interest beyond South Asia and Middle East. But, it raises a Chinese factor to justify her built up in front of the international community. For this purpose, it is planning to employ and deploy 100,000 soldiers within the next few years on Sino-India border. It is also known fact that most of such decisions always rest with elites of the states, so in case of Indian nuclear program the decision to go nuclear was solely taken by the few scientists, politicians and bureaucrats, not by the public. That is why nuclear authorities were only answerable to the office of Indian prime minister.

III. Nuclear Doctrine

The evolution and development of Indian nuclear doctrine can be principally examined and explained through the realist concept. Realism is based on assumptions that “state is a key and rational actor to decide and state seek power (broadly defined as security) both as an end in itself and as a means to advance supplementary ends”(Karnad, 2002).

During 1949 India drafted her nuclear doctrine along with formulation of Command and Control system.(Internet, India's Draft Nuclear Doctrine, 1999). The nuclear doctrine of the India claims that Minimum Credible Deterrence and No First Use (NFU) are the key features with ample ambiguity in it. Although such terms look appealing at first but the term Minimum Credible Deterrence has not been defined. Similarly, the NFU policy means that India will not use nuclear weapons to make first strike; it will only use it as second strike as India claims that she has the second strike capability which is based on the fact that it has large territory. The maintenance of Minimum Credible Deterrence is an important clause to be analysed, as it creates confusion in understating. This is clearly a source of ambiguity as India did not outline any thresholds for the said purpose. One may understand that this ambiguous policy is a deliberate tactic to create confusion for the covert agenda(Hussain, 2005). Talking about the policy of NFU one may recall the Hotel TajMahal incident, when Indian policy pundits were considering the nuclear option in case the situation escalates between India and Pakistan, which is a true violation of the NFU policy. So, one can observe that this kind of vagueness is perilous to the prevailing environment of deterrence in the region.

The doctrine also manifests that massive retaliation would be made causing gigantic destruction against the any nuclear adversary's first strike on Indian soil, forces with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. India has decided not to go for a nuclear attack against the non-nuclear states. Such nuclear attacks would be authorised by civilian leadership and NCA. Nuclear missiles, technologies and material will be kept under stringent mechanism and comprehensive export control laws. The doctrine reveals that India will stick to the policy of global disarmament.

It can be analysed that by signing Indo-US nuclear deal India and USA has violated the international norms as well as international law (NPT), along with that India has violated her own doctrine and above all it has harmed the non-proliferation regime. She has also not defined various thresholds, so it may cause reservations for the regional actors. The covert agenda, significant built up in the nuclear arsenals focusing on missile

capabilities used in land, sea and air with increasing range have alarmed the regional balance of power towards a visible arm race and more insecure future.

IV. Estimated Nuclear Inventories

There are various estimations about Indian stock piles such as India currently has 45 to 50 assembled warheads. (Norris & Kristensen, India’s nuclear forces, 2005). During 2008 it was estimated that 50 operational out of 70 assembled nuclear weapons are present in Indian arsenals.(Norris & Kristensen, Indian nuclear forces, 2008). Experts believe if 5kg plutonium is enough to fabricate each weapon than India had 310kg weapon grade plutonium in 1999 to make 65 nuclear weapons, 4200kg reactor grade plutonium to fabricate 1000 nuclear weapons in 2000 and 445kg weapon grade plutonium to make 85 nuclear weapons in 2005(Albright, India' Military Plutonium Inventory, end of 2004 (ISIS), 2005). By the 2009 India has 60 to 70 operational nuclear weapons in her arsenals (Kile, Fedchanko, & Hans M. Kristensen, 2009, p. 369).*Currently, India has 280kg to 600kg* weapon grade plutonium to fabricate 40 to 120 nuclear weapons. (Global Security Organization, 2012). However, it is believed that “the nuclear arsenals in South Asia are, and likely to remain much smaller and less sophisticated than were the U.S. and Soviet arsenals”(Sagan & Waltz, 2003, p. 91).

V. Nuclear Delivery System

The dual use delivery system of India is capable to carry nuclear and conventional weapons. Even then, Indian focus is primarily on the development of a “Nuclear Triad”, which means India will have the options to use its air crafts, land based missiles and sea based missiles. The development of Dhanush and Sagarika missile is the latest in list thus supporting the Triad designed for hegemonic agenda(Norris & Kristensen, Indian nuclear forces, 2008). The following table illustrates the Triad Indian Arsenals capabilities in detail.

Table No. 2 Indian Nuclear Delivery System with Range (Km) and Pay Load (Kg)

Air Crafts	Range (Kilometres)	Pay-load (Kilograms)
Mirage 2000H/Vajra	1,800	6,300
Jaguar IS/IB/Shamsher	1,600	4,775
Land Based Missiles	Range (Kilometres)	Pay-load (Kilograms)
Prithvi I	150	1,000
Agni I	700	1,000
Agni II	2,000	1,000
Agni III	3,000	1,500
Sea-Based Missiles	Range (Kilometres)	Payload (Kilograms)
Dhanush	350	1,000
Sagarika/K-15	300-700	500-600

Source: (Norris & Kristensen, Indian nuclear forces, 2008)

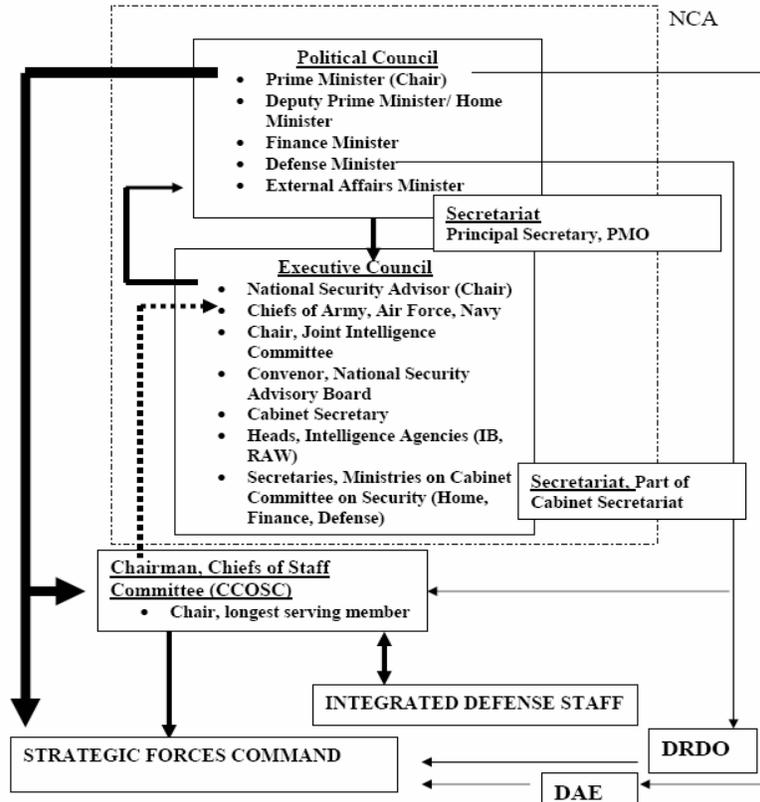
It is becoming a common perception that the increase in the range of delivery system like land and sea based missiles by India is depiction of her true hegemonic face. Hegemonic designs of India have not only posed a great threat to South Asia but it has added worries for the entire world.

It is true that foreign relations are no altruistic pursuit but extremely self-centred, self-serving motivated actions. But it is difficult to imagine that how heads of three European countries, namely David Cameron (British Prime Minister), Nicolas Sarkozy (French President) and Angela Merkel (German Chancellor) made appeasing agreement with India for selling their military hardware and other stuff to India, thus creating a situation of imbalance in region. Similarly, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's signed 30 different agreements with India including areas like defence, counter terrorism, nuclear and Space cooperation. A significant joint venture between India and Russia, for production of fifth generation fighter aircraft will not only increase the Indian air strike capability but it will enhance and strengthen her nuclear delivery system, thus infuriating the regional rivals like China and Pakistan. A similar response could be calculated from Pakistan who will follow the suit to meet her security anxiety posed by the Indian built up. Being a permanent client, India had persuaded Russia to provide nuclear submarines. Equally, it has earned the full support for her everlasting struggle to chair a permanent seat in United Nation Security Council (UNSC) and Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). It can be examined that a snail paced nuclear built up by India has now collected the support of top leaderships from international community. This development strengthens Indian aspirations to play a hegemonic role in the region.

VI. Nuclear Command and Control System

National Command and Control (NCA) comprises of Political Council chaired by the PM and Executive council chaired by National Security Advisor (NSA). Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) is the key body in Executive Council which give inputs for decision making to political council (Pahwa, 2002, p. 57). Tri-service command known as Strategic Force Command (SFC) established in 2003 manages the strategic forces. In case of the orders of a nuclear strike by political council, the PM has the privilege to contact the SFC. The following Figure describes the NCA in detail.

Figure 1 Structure of Indian National Command Authority



(Rajen, 2003)

Command and control system has a responsible role to play during the events of crisis, for instance if the command and control system is failed in any situation than the power to order a nuclear strike will rest in rogue hands. So it should be cleared as it would have serious affects for the security of the region as in such a situation anyone in the authority would be able to order nuclear strike in a misunderstanding or miscalculation.

VII. Indian Stance towards Non-Proliferation Regime

India has signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, but is reluctant to sign Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as she believes that such treaties are discriminatory and segregate world into “Nuclear Haves & Have nots”. So, it has chanted the slogan of Global disarmament (Global Security Newswire, 2012). India claims that NPT was proposed by her in 1965 for the first time, it also proposed “convention to ban nuclear weapons” and “ban on production of fissile material” in 1982, which was followed by another proposal of “Nuclear Free World” in 1988 (Gupta & Shukla, 2009, p. 195). Similarly, in 1994 India declared support to the notion of “non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery and towards their progressive reduction with the goal of elimination of such weapons” (Gupta & Shukla, 2009, p. 198). However, India has not opposed a Fissile Material Cut-off

Treaty (FMCT) which is fair, general, universal and effectively verifiable in Indian views (Rajaan, 2005, p. 269).

The nuclear explosions in 1998 by India and Pakistan do not pose any problem for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime as neither India nor Pakistan are the signatories of the any of the main international agreements. So they have not violated any of the international agreement so far. Similarly, Indo-Pak nuclear status will have little or no impact on nuclear proliferation or even strategic calculations, as these countries have had the potential to construct nuclear weapons at quite short notice for some time, and this fact is widely known (Snyder, 1999, p. 182).

VIII. Indo-US Nuclear Deal

The post-cold war era has observed that certain policy makers in the USA promoted the need of Indo-US strategic ties as a part of their foreign policy agenda in the region. The US policies towards South Asia seem to suggest that India has benefited from the paradigm shift in the US foreign policy aftermath the new world order. US has adopted the discriminatory policies instead of a collective Pakistan-India policy. There can be a number of reasons for this development but the primary rationale might be the increasing Sino-Pak relations. In addition, India would have been considered a viable option for USA to contain the emerging Chinese influence. So, the Indo-US deal has alarmed the major stakeholders in the region. Indo-US nuclear deal presented a version that USA has accepted or she wants the world to welcome India in the nuclear elite despite the fact that she is non-signatory of the NPT.

This deal has given a safe route to Indian regional hegemonic aspirations as it earned the trade benefits with Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) and classified her 14 out of 22 facilities as civilian, whereas the rest of the facilities are military facilities out of inspection of International Atomic Energy Agency (Jaspal, 2008).

India is getting the supply of nuclear reactors and uranium through numerous agreements with France, Russia, Namibia and Argentina that were signed during 2008-09. She is also going for the similar agreement with Kazakhstan as well. The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and Areva have also signed agreements to provide European Pressurised Reactors (EPR) to India (Global Security Newswire, 2012).

In the company of such agreements, it has been observed that the Indo-US nuclear deal is an unnecessary risk as there are multiple inexpensive alternatives available to meet the energy demands of India. The alarming question is that not a single clause of the agreement halts India from increasing her weaponry and production of fissile material. There is every reason to believe that India may divert this peaceful technology to enhance her nuclear weapon stockpile (Bojoria & Pan, 2010).

It can be argued that the Indo-US nuclear deal will have serious implications for the whole region and particularly for the Pakistan. Obviously, it will enhance Indian capabilities to increase her fissile stocks and likelihoods of improving its nuclear weapons that could ultimately trigger arm race in the region between Pakistan, India and China. So, there is some substance in the argument that US is backing Indian hegemonic aspirations in the region which may affect upon the interests of other regional actors.

IX. Ballistic Missile Defense

India has been taking massive measures for strengthening its defence against Ariel attacks. It's these efforts have certain implications for the regional peace and stability. It tried to get the Arrow Anti-Missile System from Israel but it was not provided the required device. However, US offered to sell its Patriot-II anti-missile system to India. US experts briefed the Indian officials on the technical performance of the system as well. But, the Indians are interested in the Patriot-III system. India claims that it is the fourth nation capable of developing ABM technology by employing indigenous resources (Outlook India, 2006). It can be argued that ABM technology has jeopardized the prevailing South Asian deterrence environment. Furthermore, it may intensify the arm race between India and Pakistan. Because of the hostile nature of relations, the both countries would prefer to go for qualitative and quantitative increase in the arms and equipment to create a balance with each other. That may lead to some conflict with high probabilities of escalation or any miscalculation.

X. Regional Hegemonic Aspirations of Nuclear India

The analysis of Indian nuclear doctrine, its posture and intentions suggests that Indian preferences in the international strategic environment have changed with the passage of time. In the beginning, the nuclear programme was launched to meet the civilian energy requirements. But this peaceful nuclear programme was used for the production of nuclear technology for the security purposes as the motives changed. The historical background suggests that the Indian nuclear programme has been evolving in all three models from political to prestige and then ultimately to security model. The historical episodes in shape of Sino-Indian and Indo-Pak wars have contributed a lot in this shift of paradigm of the Nuclearized India in the world. The joint threat from china and Pakistan has been an alarming calculation for Indian strategists throughout the decades.

The sophistication in military technology and the high budget allocated for defence purpose shows that India wants to counter these perceived joint threats by its neighbours. Indian regional cum global hegemony is marked by her massive missile range capabilities. The Agni series with its capability to cover 700 to 3000km ranges can hit its targets in Pakistan, Central Asia, Middle East and China (Khan, 1998). Albeit, it intends to enhance the range of Agni series up to 5000km which will jeopardize Europe, Mediterranean, Japan and Philippines. The employment of a nuclear submarine with Sagarika deployment (300-700km) can threaten the important trade routes of the world such as Far East, Europe, and Middle East. Needless to mention, a number of economies such as ASEAN and Japan depends on these routes. Such a nuclear submarine can also influence US interest in the Middle East and her basis in the Far East and Indian Ocean (Khan, 1998). The enormous scale of developments with covert hegemonic agenda by Indian elites may provoke the traditional rivals and neighbours to adopt the containment strategies and halt her way.

Future of the region in presence of such policies and development will remain uncertain. Both the nuclear powers will maintain their status quo, as there are least possibilities that they will rollback their nuclear program. In such a situation Pakistan and India must focus to strengthen their nuclear safety and security mechanism to avoid catastrophe. But few analysts believe that India and Pakistan will go for the development

of Second Strike capability to maintain credible deterrence thus fuelling the arm race (Fetter & Hagerty, 1996). The declared Indo-Pak policies manifest that the nuclear weapons are unassembled which shows the seriousness and responsibilities of the state thus minimising the unauthorised or accidental use. Despite the fact that there have been multiple Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan the nuclear standoff exists and growing with the passage of time. Even in crisis both the states has played a responsible role by not opting nuclear options but this threat cannot be over ruled in future. The use of nuclear weapons is a worse nightmare in today's world. Brodie coined the nukes as "deadly peril". (Brodie, 1966, p. 17). This technology has led the mankind to the verge of catastrophic future for coming generations. Each nation carries its historical bits and pieces on its shoulder. Realistically speaking this can certainly be corroborated in the case of nuclear India. The regional patterns of international politics suggest that India has earned the soft corner in the arena especially in the eyes of west. This might had fuelled her everlasting ambition of a regional cum global hegemonic player. Being an overwhelming growing economy as well as beneficiary of civil nuclear deal India has significant advantage to divert her resources for the acquisition of her hegemonic aspirations.

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