



# India's Nuclear Foreign Policy

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**Abstract :** India's nuclear policy is a multifaceted policy that was shaped by its colonial context. This article starting with brief historical overview of India's nuclear programmes, delves into its strategic journey from its first nuclear test as peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974 to another series of nuclear tests conducted in 1998. It examines India's strategic autonomy by highlighting India's dynamic initiatives to prove itself as a capable and responsible nuclear weapon state. This article also articulates India's approaches and response towards NPT and other non proliferation regimes. This analysis highlights India's importance in aspects of global security by focusing on India's diplomatic engagement and changing strategic partnership with global major powers. By scrutinizing India's strategic initiatives, this article aims to give comprehensive understanding about the evolution of India's nuclear journey in reaching the significant position in contemporary time where India's is holding a prominent role in establishing security and stability in the region.

**Key words:** CTBT, Foreign Policy, Non Alignment, Nuclear Diplomacy, NPT, Nuclear Weapons.

## INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is an agreement or a set of agreements between two or more nations to enhance their national interests through mutual cooperation and agreements. India has a long history of foreign policy since ancient times. More than 200 years of British rule has influenced India in so many ways that had impacted India's foreign policy to a larger extent. British took several resources from India and used India's energy to secure their own strategic position and global ambitions. After years of India's struggle for freedom, British left India in a very grass root level of condition in international arena. India gained its independence from British rule in 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. After independence, India's foreign policy was shaped by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, also known as the architect of India's foreign policy. In the eve of the post independence era, India was critical about the West and adopted anti-colonial policies to deal or maintain a relationship with other nations. India believed in peaceful cooperation, non violence, hence, played an active role in United Nations peacekeeping missions. Jawaharlal Nehru was a strong proponent of Non Alignment Movement. Non alignment is an ideology that was not formally aligned or against any major power and it was adopted by India and many newly independent countries at that time. Nehru adopted non alignment by considering the cold War scenario between the two superpower USA and USSR. Nehru was quite certain about the fact that it was not an easy task for the newly independent nations to get involved with any of these two superpowers that are constantly striving for power. At that time, the most important thing for India or other colonized countries was to promote internal socio-economic development and colonial liberation. Nuclear science and technological development was significant in India since independence. Jawaharlal Nehru with the partnership and suggestions of Homi J Bhabha, an Indian nuclear physicist, also known as the father of India's nuclear science convinced that nuclear technology can be a useful factor to play a significant role in India's further growth. But, Nehru was critical about the concept of nuclear weapons because it indicated violence and war. Nehru did not advocate nuclear technology for destructive use and called for nuclear disarmament to proceed India's development programs without being swallowed up by a nuclear arms race.

## India's Nuclear Programmes before Pokhran I

India's nuclear energy development programmes began with the objectives of peaceful use of nuclear energy to improve the quality of life, electricity generation and use of nuclear energy to gear up grain productivity. To produce nuclear energy for continuous growth and development, the Atomic Energy Commission was set up in 1948 under the chairmanship of Homi J Bhabha in the Department of Scientific Research. The main aim of this commission was to produce nuclear energy to use as fuel for the

welfare of the people of India and its peaceful military application. Another department called Department of Atomic Energy was set up in 1954 under the direct charge of PM Nehru through a Presidential order. In 1954, the Atomic Energy Establishment Trombay was found and later it was renamed as the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in 1967. The main objective of this centre was to upgrade developmental activities, radiation protection, peaceful use of nuclear energy in strategic defence management etc. For the further enhancement of the production of nuclear energy a nuclear reactor centre APSARA was established in the campus of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in 1956 and in 1960 another nuclear reactor CIRUS was established. These two nuclear reactors attracted supports and supplies from many countries such as USA, Japan, Canada, UK. A kind of cooperation in dealing with nuclear energy was built among these nations.

### India's reaction to NPT

In 1954, a peaceful mutual cooperation agreement known as the Panchasheel Agreement was signed between India and China. Despite the peaceful agreements many strategic political issues between these two countries caused an unstable relationship between these two nations. India and China have complex and long standing border disputes due to the unmarked and undefined borders drawn by British during colonial rule in India. In 1962, an intense border dispute took place between India and China over the Himalayan territorial regions Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. China occupied its control over Aksai Chin and is considered the winner of this war. This war left a mark of uneven relationship between these two nations. After this war India realised the unpreparedness of its military and it led to a significant shift in India's strategic political missions. On 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1964 China conducted its first nuclear test and becomes a nuclear weapon nation. This nuclear test by China changed the dynamic of geo-politics and also posed a serious nuclear threat to India. China started developing strategic alignment with Pakistan. Hence, it became necessary for India to change its nuclear postures to tackle potential nuclear threats.

In 1968, an International Treaty called Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty was opened for signature to be done by the countries worldwide. This treaty aims to eliminate the production and wider use of nuclear weapons to prevent the dangers of mass destruction. Several nuclear and non-nuclear states signed and agreed upon this treaty except India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. India claimed this treaty as discriminatory because this treaty divides the nations into nuclear weapons nations and non-nuclear weapons nations. At that time only five nations US, Great Britain, France, Russia and China had nuclear weapons. This treaty was a privilege for those countries having nuclear weapons as it didn't agreed on de-nuclearization of those countries having nuclear weapons. According to India this treaty was discriminatory because it closes the opportunity for the non-nuclear countries to own or develop nuclear weapons.

### Pokhran I

Being sceptical about China as nuclear weapon nation and its on growing strategic alignment with Pakistan, India decided not to sign the Non Proliferation Treaty and continue its journey to gain nuclear power to protect itself from nuclear threats. Many countries, for instance, United States and Japan banned their nuclear energy supplies to India to prohibit India from developing nuclear programmes. Despite varieties of international non proliferation pressures, India continued pursuing its nuclear programmes. In the beginning of 1970s India became ready with all the necessary objectives and tactics to test a nuclear bomb. In 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test at Pokhran, Thar Dessert. This nuclear test, also known as Pokhran I was regarded as a peaceful nuclear explosion. This nuclear explosion was codenamed as Smiling Buddha. The word Buddha evokes the symbol of peace and the main objective of this explosion was to prove India as powerful country with the ability to create nuclear weapons fostering peace and non-violence through the remarkable so called peaceful nuclear explosion. This remarkable nuclear test of India triggered many nations such as USA, China, Pakistan, while the France congratulated India for its success in peaceful nuclear test. Canada halted their nuclear collaborations with India to stop India from further nuclear power developments. In the same year after India's first nuclear test the US formed the Nuclear Suppliers Group to impose limitations on wide range of nuclear supplies across the countries. It was created to stop nuclear proliferation by controlling export and transfer of nuclear materials to prevent non-nuclear weapon states from nuclear weapon developments. Also, the US Congress passed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Legislation primarily targeting India in 1978. This legislation prohibited supplies of nuclear commodities to countries that do not follow the guidelines of International Atomic Energy Agency. The irony was the fact that China continued their nuclear transfer to Pakistan and also the US with full awareness of Pakistan's nuclear development ambitions continued their nuclear supplies to Pakistan with sophisticated weaponry by violating its own nuclear non proliferation guidelines. These nuclear and military assistance of US and China to Pakistan raised India's security concerns.

### Pokhran II

During the Cold war period, numerous nuclear weapons were used by major nuclear powers that caused mass destruction. The US nuclear attack at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan is one such example of mass destruction by nuclear bomb. Hence, many agencies and Treaties were signed by several countries to stop the wide use of nuclear weapons by banning further nuclear tests or explosions for both military and civilian purpose. In 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was introduced with the goal of nuclear disarmament to protect the world from mass nuclear destruction. India refused to sign this treaty by giving pragmatic objections against this treaty. India claimed this treaty as discriminatory because it legitimized the monopoly of those countries with nuclear weapons over those countries without nuclear weapons. After Pokhran I, India continued working on its nuclear programme secretly and by 1980s it developed all the necessary equipments to conduct a nuclear test. India faced many security challenges particularly the nuclearization of neighbour country Pakistan. In the beginning of 1990s India faced several growing economic challenges and rapidly changing global order due to the collapse of Soviet Union from which India received several economic and strategic assistance. After the end of Cold war and Soviet Union, India initiated economic liberalization policies under the leadership of PM Narasimha Rao and aimed to integrate India in global economic market along with developing India's strategic interests. Due to international pressures and economic turmoils India was unable to practice its strategic priorities, mainly the nuclear tests. Despite facing many international pressure against nuclear test, India conducted a series of five nuclear tests, collectively known as Pokhran II in 1998 under the leadership of Prime Ministers of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. This incident marked a



significant turning point in India's strategic journey. This nuclear test was followed by a long complex scientific pursuit, geopolitical strategy and national security imperatives. India articulated this nuclear test as a response to its regional security concerns and its nuclear doctrine credible minimum deterrence. In 1999, India formulated its nuclear doctrine by Nuclear Security Advisory Board. India advocated the doctrine of Credible Minimum Deterrence to convey non violent and defensive nuclear posture. India adopted the posture of "No First Use" policy, meaning that India will use nuclear weapon only in form of a retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory and the policy of not using nuclear weapons against a non nuclear nation even in the time of war was also adopted under India's nuclear doctrine.

### India and major powers after Pokhran II

India's nuclear diplomacy reach to a different level after these events. Many other nations were highly disturbed by India's successful nuclear tests claiming these tests as negative influence towards nuclear proliferation and possible mass destruction. The US President Bill Clinton stated that this action by India is not only a danger towards the stability of the region but also challenged the international consensus to prevent non proliferation. The US initiated several economic sanctions upon India as a punishment such as ending US credit and credit guarantees to India. The US denied visas to eminent scientists of India to isolate them from the scientists all over the world. But, these sanctions could not harm India beyond its manageable point. India after the Cold war adopted the policy of Liberalisation after which India's economy reached to a significant level more than ever before and Indian market became the centre point of trade for many countries. European Union and many other countries were not convinced by US regarding the economic sanctions upon India because these sanctions could make India more desperate and determined to conduct more secret nuclear programmes. Many opponents of the economic sanctions came with many arguments by focusing on the importance of India's geopolitical context. They understood that maintaining a peaceful and strategic engagement with India was crucial for long term interests of US because of its democratic system, strategic location and land full of resources to bring market potential for American goods and services. It was also important for India to maintain strategic co-operations with the major power countries to improve its bilateral relations and enhance further nuclear programmes. After mutually understanding several strategic point of views the relationship between India and US gradually improved. The 9/11 attack at the World Trade Organization by Pakistani terrorist group Al- Qaeda became the turning point for the Indo-US relationship. After this attack US realized the similar kind of threat with India from Pakistan and realised that US interest needs a strong bilateral relationship with India. On July 18<sup>th</sup> 2005, India and US signed an agreement for civilian nuclear energy inter space corporation. Under the proposed deal of this agreement India would place many of its nuclear reactors under IAEA safeguards, allow US to build nuclear reactors in India and US would provide nuclear fuel for India's civilian nuclear reactors allowing India to access to the international fuel market. Another agreement, India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, officially known as 123 Agreement was signed in 2008. It is a significant milestone in shaping bilateral relationship between India and US. This was a landmark deal which allowed India to deal with NSG members. Despite not being's a member of Nuclear Suppliers Group India gained significant supports from NSG member countries due to its strict maintenance and control of nuclear technology safeguards.

Russia's reaction towards after Pokhran II was quite different from the US. Russia maintained more pragmatic and understanding stance towards India and the series of nuclear tests, Pokhran II remained largely unaffected in terms of the strategic relationship between India and Russia. While the US talked about imposing various sanctions upon India as counterattack against India's nuclear tests, Russia was suspicious and didn't support the US in imposing stringent sanctions on India. Russia continued its diplomatic engagement even right after the Pokhran II due to various mutual interests between India and Russia such as the defence relationship. Around 60-70% Russian defence equipments are purchased by India. India has purchased MiG aircrafts, Sukhoi-30 fighters, T-72 Tanks etc. from Russia. After the cold War Russia needed strong allies and partnerships, hence, Russia maintained its allies with India to break the US hegemony in a unipolar world. Due to India's geopolitical stand, Russia identified India as a strong potential strategic ally that significantly goes beyond South Asian Region. In 2008, Russia played a supportive role for India in securing a waiver from Nuclear Supplier Group that allows India to engage in nuclear commerce with other countries without being a member of NSG.

The nuclear relationship between India and China has been a critical component of the geopolitical and security component in the Asian regions. The Pokhran II nuclear tests in 1998 significantly changed the dynamics of security concerns and assessments of China towards India. China's immediate reaction to the Pokhran II was silent in the beginning. To give an immediate opinion to a sudden and surprising nuclear test was not reasonable as per China's government. On the political point of view China didn't take India as a serious nuclear threat because India's nuclear capabilities were too moderate to match the level of China's nuclear capabilities at that time. The then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee justified India's Pokhran II in 1998 as a ground of national security primarily from the perceived nuclear threat from China. Later on, China argues that the nuclear tests by India is contrary to the regional security dynamics of South Asia. China strongly condemned India's nuclear tests as destabilizing and could put India and Pakistan in a dangerous standoff which was a threat to China's southern border security. As India was not a signatory of Non Proliferation Treaty and Comprehensive Tests Ban Treaty China criticized India's nuclear tests as contrary to the non proliferation regimes. China was also in support of imposing sanctions on India and urged India to adhere to the NPT and CTBT. The gradual nuclear bilateral agreements of India with other superpowers and rapid developments of India's nuclear capabilities directly impacted China's security concerns. This, China convinced itself to ensure stability and engage in nuclear dialogues with India to stabilize their nuclear security. Both China and India adopted "No First Use" which is a crucial step in managing and reducing nuclear conflict between these two nations. Both countries have agreed upon many confidence building measures such as to maintain peace and tranquillity with the Line of Actual Control and military hotlines to prevent the risks of nuclear escalations. Despite improvements in diplomatic engagement, the relationship between India and China can be characterised as the mixture of conflict and cooperation. Both nations continues to develop and modernize their nuclear arsenals. While both nations engaged in dialogues, diplomatic efforts to reduce the rivalries but their border disputes, geopolitical competition, China's partnership with Pakistan remain as the point of conflict between these two powerful nations.

## Conclusion

India's nuclear foreign policy has colonial footprints and it has been a complex evolving aspects of its broader strategic dynamics. India's nuclear diplomacy is characterised by its active involvement in global disarmament initiatives, credible minimum deterrence and the policy of no first use. India's nuclear diplomacy has significantly evolved after the nuclear test in 1974. After the second series of nuclear tests in 1998 India continues to engage with global powers in terms of nuclear strategic agreements. Despite not being a signatory of the CTBT and the NPT, India has maintained a unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing that proves India's robust diplomatic strategy and nuclear autonomy. India's nuclear doctrine of no first use policy is intended to reduce the risk mass destruction by addressing it as a weapon for the purpose of security from nuclear threats. This policy projects India as a responsible nuclear weapons nation. However the credibility and practicality of this defensive policy often comes under various debates and discussions. Many argues that the stability of the no first use policy under India's nuclear doctrine depends on the future circumstances such as changing global security dynamics and India's technological advancements. India's existing nuclear policy has served India to gain sufficient nuclear deterrence for its adversaries but with the changing geopolitical security dynamics India needs to update the existing version of its nuclear doctrine. Even though India has not reached the level of the other major powers in terms of nuclear diplomacy, India has come a long way and secured a position to join in three out of four Multilateral Export Control Regime. Multilateral Export Control regime was created as a voluntary cooperative arrangement by the major powers to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to control the export of conventional military equipments that has both civilian and military use. The Nuclear Suppliers Group is also a part of the Multilateral Export Control Regime where India is not a member. Due to the US India Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008, India marked significant milestone towards its nuclear development and gained several support and assistance from NSG member countries without being a member. Moreover, India's current diplomatic strategies are actively pursuing the ways to step into the NSG. As the global geopolitical environment changes, India faces new challenges and opportunities as well. India's nuclear policy must remain adaptable coupled with technological advancements, consistent geopolitical strategies and diplomatic engagement with other nations to safeguard its national interests while contributing to global security and stability.

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