

THE FALSE PROMISE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

GREAT POWER OR SUBORDINATE ALLY?

Since the Second World War, nuclear weapons have been critical assets for the affirmation and projection of national power. The end of the Cold War raised the profile of second and third tier nuclear states as well as of those aspiring to acquire such weapons. Although India has been a de facto member of the nuclear club since 1998, this has only heightened the security challenge posed by Pakistan which has also acquired a nuclear offensive force while carrying out asymmetric warfare, thereby making Indian full scale retaliation risky. By partly accommodating India's strategic ambitions, the US has bound New Delhi in a partnership directed mainly against China and Iran hoping also to conquer the vast Indian market for American goods and services. Moreover India is still blocked from joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group and has sacrificed some strategic autonomy to satisfy Washington's requirements while remaining vulnerable to Pakistani and Chinese hostility. On balance the pursuit of a nuclear deterrent has brought more losses than gains.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since human beings organised themselves into political communities, the phenomenon of power maximisation has run throughout history. The maxim holds true for modern nation-states as well, as throughout history they have been nudged in the direction of a "struggle for power". As

Hans Morgenthau (*Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New Delhi: Kalyani, 2010, p31) has written, “International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim”. While the expression of power has changed over time its presence in material terms has remained intact—notwithstanding the post-structuralist variant of knowledge as power. In international relations theory scholarship, the notion of power has been understood as an “entity” intrinsic to tangible things such as the military, wealth and geography (Janice B Mattern, “The Concept of Power and the (Un)discipline of International Relations” in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p692). Following from this conception, the study of international relations has developed into a discipline focussed on material resources and the states that control them remain methodologically preoccupied with tangible measures normatively complicit with militarisation and violence (*ibid*).

Given such materialist anchorage of the discipline coupled with its normative complacency towards military augmentation and violence, the evolution of nuclear weapons has received both reception and rebuke by scholars. Kenneth Waltz views the presence of nuclear weapons in the international security architecture as a necessary condition for peace.

“Deterrent strategies induce caution all around the world and thus reduce the incidence of war ... deterrent strategies lower the probability that wars will begin. If wars start nonetheless, deterrent strategies lower the probability that they will be carried very far” (Scott D Sagan and Kenneth N Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*, New York: WW Norton, 2013, p36).

Scott D Sagan (*ibid*, p46) however rejects the “rational nuclear deterrence” thesis of Waltz and avers that a tense situation might fail to impress upon a

belligerent nuclear armed state the global ramifications of its actions leading to disastrous consequences of a nuclear conflagration. Viewing the presence of nuclear weapons from the vantage point of the global hegemon, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and William H Riker (“An Assessment of the Merits of Selective Nuclear Proliferation”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol26, no2, 1982, pp283–306) state that nuclear weapons correct the asymmetric distribution of power between adversaries, which in turn limits the chances of war. Offensive realists like John J Mearsheimer (*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: WW Norton, 2014, p128) also repose immense faith in the deterrent capability of nuclear weapons. He is of the opinion that nuclear weapons are pioneering in a purely military sense, ostensibly because of their potential to cause unprecedented levels of destruction in a short period of time.

Notwithstanding all the debates on the presence of nuclear weapons, states have coveted the acquisition of these strategic assets. Such a trend has been largely the result of discourse which pegs the possession of nuclear weapons to great power status. Speaking on the possession of nuclear weapons, West German minister Franz Josef Strauss told his cabinet in 1954, “today a nation that does not produce atomic weapons itself is *déclassé*” (Paul M Pitman, “A General Named Eisenhower: Atlantic Crisis and the Origins of the European Economic Community” in Marc Trachtenberg, *Between Empire and Alliance: America and Europe During the Cold War*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, p47). Scott D Sagan (“Why do States build Nuclear Weapons: Three Models in Search of a Bomb” (*International Security*, vol21, no3, Winter 1996–97, p73) also posits a similar argument that the decision by policymakers to go nuclear serves important symbolic functions in both shaping and reflecting a state’s identity. State behaviour is determined not by a leader’s cold calculations about national security interests but by deeper norms and shared beliefs about what actions are legitimate and appropriate in international relations.

“Given the importance of the subject and the large normative literature in ethics and law concerning the use of nuclear weapons, it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to ‘nuclear symbolism’ and the development of international norms concerning the acquisition of nuclear weapons ... from this perspective military organisations and their weapons can therefore be envisioned as serving similar functions to those of flags, airlines and Olympic teams—they are part of what modern states believe they have to possess to be legitimate, modern states” (*ibid*, pp73–4).

Replacing the term “modern” in Sagan’s scheme with “great power”, makes for better understanding of the spread of nuclear weapons. For countries like Britain and France that suffered immensely from the massive eco–demographic loss in the aftermath of the Second World War, nuclear weapons served the dual purpose of mitigating the collective depression of the populace and allowed a repositioning of the states as rejuvenated “great powers” in the comity of nation-states. For instance, after the Suez Crisis of 1956, nuclear weapons were viewed by British policymakers as an important way of disguising the country’s reduced status.

“Nuclear weapons may be summed up as more than modern military arms ... the creation and continuation of an independent nuclear force can best be understood in the context of a once great power in decline, attempting to adjust to reduced circumstances ... although she did not possess the same economic and military resources as the two principal superpowers, Britain was thought to be more than just a European power because of her global interest and responsibilities. After (the Suez Crisis), recognition slowly grew that she was no longer a world power and the ‘independent deterrent’ became at once both the symbol of Britain’s great power claim and a disguise for her diminished status” (John Baylis and Kristan Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience: The Roles of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p10).

Similarly, the decision of the French government led by Charles de Gaulle to build nuclear weapons emerged after the Algerian Crisis and served as a symbol of French grandeur and independence (Sagan, 1996, *ibid*, p78). A few months after de Gaulle’s return to power in 1958, he declared in a press conference that as long as the United States of America (US), the Soviet Union and Great Britain possess nuclear weapons, “France will not accept a position of chronic and overwhelming inferiority” (Wilfred L Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, pp15–6). The belief that nuclear weapons were organically linked to a state’s position in the international system became apparent in the first Five Year Plan which came to fruition in 1960, ostensibly as a result of de Gaulle’s assessment that “the atomic bomb was a dramatic symbol of French independence and was thus needed for France to continue to be seen, by itself and others, as a great power” (Sagan, 1996, *ibid*).

THE NUCLEAR APPLE BITTEN

The end of the Cold War led to a cessation of hostilities between the East and West, causing a moment of transitory flux resulting in the centre of gravity of the international nuclear security system moving from Europe to Asia (Bharat Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2009, p1). The focus of the coalition of the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries shifted to outlier regions with second tier nuclear weapon states (China and prospectively India), third tier states (Pakistan and Israel), threshold countries (North Korea and Iran) and aspirant states (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt). The widespread belief was that peace, order and stability in Asia and the world would rest on the behaviour of these “new nuclear states” and managing security would require an appropriate understanding of the nuclear politics and strategic thinking in these countries (*ibid*).

Of all the nuclear dyads, the India–Pakistan one endured with both countries acquiring nuclear weapons against the wishes of the US. Other potential nuclear aspirants were either mollified by the US or the issue settled through a multilateral treaty commitment leading to a decade long delay of nuclear enrichment, for instance Iran's acquiescence to American terms at Lausanne in 2016. North Korea has been a deviant player that has played its nuclear card much to the consternation of the West. Pyongyang did not become a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) until 1985, mainly because of its influential neighbour China's hostile attitude to the treaty (Ian Bellany, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, p31). North Korea's nuclear programme originated with a small Soviet supplied research reactor in 1977 (*ibid*), leading to the first detonation in 2006 and an underground test conducted in September 2016. Unlike other nuclear tests, North Korea's do not speak to its intentions of becoming a great power but rather constitute a deterrence of the US and its allies from using military force against the regime (Taiho Lin, “Toward a Nuclear Peace in East Asia: Facing North Korea's Nuclear Reality”, *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol18, no1, 2004, p49). The argument that “the nuclear brinkmanship of North Korea limits the policy options of the US and its allies” (*ibid*), holds true as the country does not fulfil the prerequisites of becoming a great power, namely geography, a peaceful neighbourhood, a growing market economy and most importantly a normative commitment to the world order (William C Wohlforth, “The Stability of a

Unipolar World”, *Quarterly Journal: International Security*, vol24, no1, Summer 1999, pp5–41).

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by India spoke directly to its intentions of becoming a great power even though its strategic history indicated abstinence from such an action. Baldev Raj Nayar and TV Paul (*India in the World Order: Searching for Major Power Status*, New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2004, p17) demarcate three distinct phases in India’s search for a great power role. The first extends from independence in 1947 to the early 1960s, when there existed a stark divergence between ambition and material capabilities. However, despite a lack of the latter, the Indian establishment attempted to play a leading role on the basis of “soft power” defined in terms of diplomacy and ideological appeal (*ibid*). The second phase started in 1962, after the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese and lasted until 1998 (*ibid*, p19). This is an intriguing phase

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marked by India’s bid to overcome a concatenation of challenges pertaining to the economy, domestic politics, military conflict and several insurgencies. Externally, the Asian security architecture was directed by both Washington and Beijing (*ibid*). For the US, the Sino–Soviet split was a crucial diplomatic moment to use China as a “pivotal state” against the Soviet Union (Wohlforth, *ibid*, p30). At the same time, the US wanted India to acquire nuclear weapons to counter Chinese dominance in the region, an offer that Jawaharlal Nehru clandestinely declined (Maharajakrishna Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, New Delhi: Viking, 2016, p19). This phase also marked the race between two powerful impulses, the drive to build strong economic and material capabilities and the will to retain the nuclear option. On the other hand, Western powers hastened to nip in the bud the Indian nuclear programme through the NPT, while retaining their monopoly over nuclear weapons and refusing to commit themselves to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction (*ibid*). Philosophically as well Nehru was not inclined towards a geopolitically competitive subcontinent brimming with insecurity (Ashok Kapur, *India and the South Asian Strategic Triangle*, Abingdon: Routledge 2011, p3). After the Chinese aggression, Nehru was not

able to convince his countrymen of China's hostility and thus failed to get them out of their *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* complacency.

It was with the May 1998 detonations that India entered a third phase brushing aside all ambiguities about its assumption of great power status on the international political stage (Nayar and Paul, 2004, *ibid*, p20). Contrary to historical evidence, the acquisition of the nuclear bomb deepened India's security dilemma vis-à-vis Pakistan as its territorial advantage was negated by Pakistan's acquisition of both strategic and tactical weapons coupled with the presence of the US and China in the subcontinent's security architecture. Washington's strong rebuke of any attempt on the part of any West Asian state, apart from Israel, acquiring nuclear assets has worked in favour of the Jewish state becoming the unchallenged and unassailable power in the region, despite its lack of strategic depth. In the case of India, nuclear weapons militated against the advantages of strategic depth and conventional superiority with which it was geographically and historically endowed. The nuclear detonation at Pokhran in May 1998 was the first major policy decision on national security undertaken by the Bharatiya Janata Party led National Democratic Alliance coalition government. Writing on the history of political parties clamouring for nuclear weapons, George Perkovich (*India's Nuclear Bomb: Impact on Global Proliferation*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p151) says that of all the political players it was the Jansangh, the political precursor of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which was "the most vocal pro-bomb party. It argued that India's prestige and national security depended on nuclear weapons". The then national security adviser Brajesh Mishra's statement ("Government Concerned over the Nuclear Environment in the Neighbourhood", *The Hindu*, 16 May 1998, p1) regarding the government's deep concerns about the nuclear environment in India's immediate neighbourhood and the reassurance which the detonation would provide to the people "that their national security interests are paramount and will be promoted", reflected similar anxieties faced by policymakers in Britain and France after the Second World War. However, European anxieties were mitigated by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. In India's case there seems to be no such possibility because Pakistan unlike the Soviet Union is not economically delinked from the global economy, has been part of US led collective security systems like the Central Treaty Organisation and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation and has played a geopolitically active role since the 1960s when its good offices helped bring about a Sino-American rapprochement and a virtual alliance against Moscow

for the remaining years of the Cold War (Andrew Small, *The China–Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics*, Gurgaon: Random House, 2015, p22). Last but not least, the China–Pakistan friendship has been one of the world’s most enduring geopolitical partnerships, withstanding systemic and regional strains.

FAITH BELIED

Being locked in a regional security complex is one of the major impediments faced by a state looking to assume the global responsibilities of a great power. History stands witness to the fact that a friendly neighbourhood is the *sine qua non* for a country to assume such a mantle. The rise and fall of great powers in post-Westphalian Europe was the result of challenges posed by neighbouring states that felt insecure about the increase in the relative power differential of the rising state. Germany’s rise to great power status was the effect of an increase in its growth rates which fuelled its foreign policy ambitions (Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise”, *International Security*, vol17, no4, Spring 1993, p22). The eighteenth century Anglo–French rivalry was the result of the security threat posed by French preponderance to British interests

(*ibid*, p19). Achieving great power status was contingent upon winning wars against adversaries which involved substantial investment of resources but a final winner would emerge that would assume the role of a great power state. In post-Napoleonic Europe, the victorious states formed the Concert of Europe, which included France, wherein the victors along with the vanquished sustained the system. Such score settling is not feasible in a nuclear armed region like South Asia wherein the cost of going to war would entail partial or total obliteration. India–Pakistan rivalry is steeped in history and exacerbated by politics. It is marked by strong irredentist sentiments which contain the seeds of violence and are major impediments to an amicable solution acceptable to both countries. The presence

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of the bomb has ticked off from the list the possibility of “settlement by war”. Such static status quoism has worked against India’s long term interests, as it has kept it engaged in a constant locking of horns with Pakistan with no substantial results either in favour or against. It has been a tripartite battle of nerves between India, Pakistan and non-state actors emboldened under the nuclear shadow. The situation has been marked by sporadic hostilities and other forms of asymmetric warfare which reduce the chances of durable peace and cooperation.

Nuclear deterrence “has been elevated to the level of theology” (Praveen Swami, *The Kargil War*, New Delhi: LeftWord, 2005, p50). In a speech in 1999, former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee laid out a “not so new doctrine”.

“Now both India and Pakistan are in possession of nuclear weapons. There is no alternative but to live in harmony. The nuclear weapon is not an offensive weapon. It is a weapon of self-defence. It is the kind of weapon that helps in preserving the peace. If in the days of the Cold War there was no use of force it was because of the balance of terror” (“Reply to the Debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President”, Lok Sabha, 15 March 1999 in Swami, *ibid*).

Such a faith however was belied by the Kargil War of 1999. Pakistan’s action was a clear departure from the three previous wars as the conflict transpired at a juncture when the subcontinent had just barged into a nuclearised security environment. Writing on the profound implications of overt nuclearisation on regional peace and stability, Aijaz Ahmad proved correct the prognostications of a section of scholars that nuclear status would be used by Pakistan to advance its goals in Jammu and Kashmir (Kapur, *ibid*).

“Pokhran was a gift to Sharif as the Afghan war had been for Zia-ul-Haq. Since 1971, Pakistan had been trying, unsuccessfully to overcome its strategic inferiority in conventional warfare. By opening the way for nuclear parity and competitive weaponisation, the Vajpayee government gifted to Pakistan a strategic parity that it could not otherwise achieve. To the extent that the possession of nuclear weapons capability by both sides tends to put serious constraints on a full scale conventional war, to the same extent it facilitates the institutionalisation of low intensity localised wars. The more the two countries move forward toward nuclearisation, the more Kargils we shall have. In this sense, the present reality in Kargil is not only the other face of the rhetoric of

Lahore, it is also a precise, necessary, repeatable consequence of Pokhran” (Aijaz Ahmad, “The Many Roads to Kargil”, *Frontline*, 16 July 1999).

The ultra parsimonious assumption that the Cold War logic of nuclear weapons inducing peace would hold in the regional dynamics of South Asia is inherently flawed. TV Paul (*The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World*, Gurgaon: Random House, 2014, p29) argues that a “warrior state” like Pakistan creates several social, political and psychological pathologies which the military elite exploits whenever it gets a chance to do so. The military establishment tends to assign low weightage to diplomacy and the political settlement of territorial disputes leading to an exacerbation of tensions. Along with this, much of Pakistan’s defence literature is dedicated to negative depictions of India and Indians who are always reduced to their brash and uncouth “Hindu” nature (C Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army’s Way of War*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014, p159). Such “pathological” instincts did not accrue in the case of the Soviet Union. Although it was a revolutionary revisionist state aiming for global domination and ideological hegemony it was nonetheless ruled by a revolutionary vanguard party (Randall L Schweller, “Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory” in Alastair I Johnston and Robert S

Ross (Eds), *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, New York: Routledge, 1999, pp1–32). The joint endorsements of the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the NPT of 1968 show that policymakers in the Soviet Union were not guided by prophetic prescriptions and civilisational imperatives as the *raison d’être* of existence, thus proscribing irrationality at the decision making table.

Islamabad’s Kashmir policy has been rightfully termed as “revisionist” (Varun Sahni, “The Stability–Instability Paradox: A Less than Perfect Explanation” in Eswaran Sridharan (Ed), *India–Pakistan Nuclear Relationship: Theories of Deterrence and International Relations*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2007, p198). Pakistan’s attempt to wrest Kashmir represents a civilisational longing which has

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to be fulfilled no matter what the consequences, as it would be a spatial fix for a “moth-eaten” country and an identitarian merger of a Muslim majority province. Despite the maxim of “Kashmir is with India, the issue is with Pakistan” (*ibid*, p199), the “K” question has had an egregious intertwining with the “N” question, making the maintenance of the status quo a geopolitical compulsion. This in turn has created a situation similar to the stability–instability paradox which has allowed Pakistan to walk on the edge of war (Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Second Strike: Arguments about Nuclear War in South Asia*, New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 2005, p47). India, on the other hand, has not been able to punish the perpetrators of asymmetric warfare as they operate under the nuclear umbrella and this has created a permanent situation of hostility, unparalleled in the history of modern nation-states. Such hostility has negatively impacted the ennobling energies of regional integration, as other smaller states have come to terms with the reality that attempts at integration will not succeed until and unless India and Pakistan hammer out their differences. It was the threat of a great power nuclear war engulfing South Asia that led Nehru to sign unequal treaties with Himalayan states in order to keep such conflict away from the region (Nabarun Roy, *A Study of Deviant State Behaviour: Indian Foreign Policy 1947–62*, Ottawa: Carleton University, 2011, p3). Overt nuclearisation demolished the Nehruvian vestiges of strategic abstinence.

“India’s 1998 nuclear tests seemed to be the act of a rising power. They were coupled with a sharp political attack on the weakest of the great powers—China—and an appeal for strategic cooperation with the biggest—America” (Stephen P Cohen, “India and the Region” in David M Malone, C Raja Mohan and Srinath Raghavan (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp341–55).

THE ACCOMMODATION OF A RISING POWER

It has been historically noted that a rising great power is accommodated or co-opted into the structure either under the hood of a leviathan or at best left to pursue goals in splendid isolation. Accommodation in international relations at the great power level involves “mutual adaptation and acceptance by established and rising powers and the elimination or substantial reduction of hostility between them” (TV Paul, “The Accommodation of Rising Powers in World

Politics” in TV Paul (Ed), *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present and Future*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p4). US–India relations were not marked by hostility. As the Non-Aligned Movement faded into oblivion, bilateral relations saw a graduation from “strategic friendship” to “strategic partnership” in the post-Cold War world (Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Nuclear Disarmament*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002). America’s accommodation of India followed the logic of “region specific accommodation” wherein a rising power is given primacy in a specific region but not at the global level (Paul, 2016, *ibid*). Given New Delhi’s principled opposition to the NPT which came up for review in 1995, India felt that no progress had been made on the concerns it had expressed nearly thirty years earlier and a clear message of non-acquiescence was sent to the US (Jaideep A Prabhu, “Indian Scientists in Defence and Foreign Policy” in Malone, Raja Mohan and Raghavan, *ibid*, p322).

Pokhran II presented the US the opportunity to rope in India under its accommodative security architecture which throughout history has been subject to timely and cunning tweaks whenever the need has arisen. To avoid Washington’s wrath, Vajpayee in a letter to President Bill Clinton cited China and Pakistan and the clandestine nuclear collaboration between the two as the main justification for crossing the nuclear threshold (Bidwai and Vanaik, 2002, *ibid*, p55). The explicit mention of China coupled with the upright admission that the “nuclear decision was not ‘Pakistan specific’ and went beyond South Asian or regional considerations” (*ibid*), left the US in a dilemma. However, with the benefit of hindsight, as C Raja Mohan (“Foreign Policy after 1990: Transformation through Incremental Adaption” in Malone, Raja Mohan and Raghavan, *ibid*, p133) notes, “India’s nuclear tests provided a basis for an intensive engagement with the US and an opportunity to resolve extended disputes with Washington on non-proliferation issues that began with the emergence of the NPT in 1970 and the negative international response to India’s ‘peaceful’ nuclear tests”. From the American point of view, Pokhran II in its immediate aftermath represented

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the staking of the global nuclear order, while on the Indian side the detonation symbolised a resolve and resilience which boosted national self-esteem and self-confidence (Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004, p5). The Republican dominated US Congress was eager to expand economic ties with India instead of placing heavy sanctions, a contention shared by major European powers (Dhruva Jaishankar, “Chronicle of a Deal Foretold: Washington’s Perspective on Negotiating the Indo–US Nuclear Agreement” in PR Chari (Ed), *Indo–US Nuclear Deal: Seeking Synergy in Bilateralism*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2009, p100).

“The French in particular were champing at the bit to reopen loans from the World Bank and other financial institutions ... in September 1998, during a visit by Vajpayee to Paris, President Jacques Chirac had announced that France would conduct its own ‘strategic dialogue’ with New Delhi. Both France and India regarded this new channel as a way of tweaking Uncle Sam’s nose. The French thought they had found in India, a partner in their effort to build what they called a ‘multipolar’ international system—that is, one in which a strong, largely French led European Union would offer an alternative to the ‘unipolar’ world headquartered in Washington” (Talbott, *ibid*, p143).

Following France, other European countries like Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom displayed signs of acquiescence and temptation to normalise their own relations with India (*ibid*). Facing a catch-22 situation, the US decided to give in to India’s immense diplomatic efforts leading to Clinton’s triumphal visit to New Delhi engaging both countries on a positive note (*ibid*, p6). Thus, began the subordination of the new strategic partner through accommodation and bargain.

The Indo–US nuclear deal arrived on the diplomatic plane seeking “new synergy in bilateralism” (Chari, *ibid*). The deal aimed at achieving a breakthrough agreement covering active nuclear cooperation between the countries but not on an equal footing. The main aim of negotiations was not merely a strategic relationship with India but the creation of a viable market for American nuclear energy firms which would benefit immensely by selling their civilian nuclear power equipment to India (Reshmi Kazi, “The Process of Negotiation of the Nuclear Deal/123 Agreement (India)” in Chari, *ibid*, p82). From the beginning of negotiations on 18 July 2005, the course was marked by perennial US insistence to changes in the terms and conditions of the deal (Prakash Karat, *Subordinate Ally: The Nuclear Deal and India–US Strategic Relations*, New Delhi:

LeftWord, 2007, p36). The statement of policy contained in the bill not only warranted to bind India on nuclear issues but reflected larger foreign policy imperatives as well. For instance, the first draft of the bill adopted by the House of Representatives explicitly required the country to “dissuade, isolate and if necessary sanction and contain Iran” (*ibid*, p37). The diplomatic fruition of this proposal was seen in India’s vote against Iran in 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2011 at the International Atomic Energy Agency proceedings for failing to comply with the NPT, a treaty that India regards with condescension and suspicion for not enshrining a time bound clause for the abolition of nuclear weapons (Ronak D Desai, “On Iran, India’s Record is Better than you Think”, *The Huffington Post*, 11 October 2012). Such diplomatic overtures by India acting under the pressure of the US directly impacted its economic relations with other countries. For instance, the ambitious India–Pakistan–Iran gas pipeline project was put in limbo as a result of India’s votes (Karat, 2007, *ibid*, p59).

The deal also dealt a severe blow to the moral prestige of India as one of the torch bearers of the Non-Aligned Movement. An assessment of Indian foreign policy during the Nehru years “reveals that the country’s behaviour did in fact resemble that of the great powers” (Roy, *ibid*, p5). India’s policy of non-alignment following a *realpolitik* thesis may be understood through the prism of “balance of power”, wherein the country by becoming an independent pole could work assiduously towards its way for great power status (*ibid*). However, a closer examination reveals that non-alignment was predicated upon Nehru’s threat perception and insecurity which emanated from the bipolar international security architecture (*ibid*, p12).

“In India’s case, the dyadic conceptualisation of threat was muted. A close study of the material pertaining to Indian decision making during the 1947–62

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period reveals the absence of a particular state or group of states which India saw as posing a threat to its security ... instead, India conceptualised the threat in a non-dyadic sense. The intense competition between the US (on the one hand) and the Soviet Union and Communist China (on the other) on the Asian landmass was an extremely worrisome development for Nehru. Given the fact that decolonisation was taking place at a rapid pace on the continent, the Western and Communist powers were trying hard to recruit new converts to their cause ... in order to avoid getting drawn into the vicious Cold War politics and becoming a theatre of great power war, India announced its non-aligned foreign policy from the very beginning of its existence as an independent state” (*ibid*, pp13–4).

In contemporary times while it is true that there is no “Cold War vortex” which India may be afraid of becoming entangled in and the US reigns as the *sui generis* hegemon, there are mute challengers to American hegemony that Washington wants to contain by pitting other regional players against them. The Indo–US deal kept India’s sovereign right to test a nuclear device in the future intact and encouraged it to divert locally obtained fissile material to build-up a large stockpile of nuclear weapons (Lalit Mansingh, “The Indo–US Nuclear Deal in the Context of Indian Foreign Policy” in Chari, *ibid*, pp177–82). Such relaxation was motivated by the wish to contain China’s rise. The deal also locked India into long term strategic military cooperation with the US. Prior to the joint statement of July 2005, the United Progressive Alliance government signed a ten year Defence Framework Agreement with Washington as a *quid pro quo* for the nuclear cooperation promised under the deal (Karat, 2007, *ibid*, p30). The years between 2005 and 2007 “marked a sharp increase in joint exercises between the two armed forces” (*ibid*) like the one at the Kalaikunda airbase in West Bengal (Manoj Joshi, “The Media and the Making of Indian Foreign Policy” in Malone, Raja Mohan and Raghavan, *ibid*, p265) which evinced vehement opposition from Left parties. This was then “extended to quadrilateral exercises as desired by the US with Japan and Australia in the September naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal” (Karat, 2007, *ibid*, p31).

The most contemporary metamorphosis of the Defence Framework Agreement has been the formalisation of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement under the aegis of a Logistics Support Agreement announced in April 2016. Logistics Support Agreements are signed by the US with military allies to enable its armed forces to use the base facilities of the concerned countries—

the Philippines and South Korea are signatories to such arrangements (Prakash Karat, “Logistics Agreement: Surrender to US, Betrayal of Sovereignty”, *Peoples Democracy*, 2016, online at <http://peoplesdemocracy.in>). The agreement also aims to draw India into the strategic orbit of the US and integrate it more closely with Washington’s global agenda as a junior partner which American policymakers envisage on security and political grounds (Saroj Bishoyi, “Logistics Support Agreement: A Closer Look at the Impact on India–US Strategic Relationship”, *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol7, no1, 2013, pp158–9). History bears testimony to the fact that the US has cut-off weapon supplies to India at crucial junctures. After war broke out with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, the American administration suspended the supply of weapons to India (*ibid*, p160). The subordination of India as a junior ally of the US does not provide a guarantee against American unpredictability.

The conscious “sell-out” of India’s strategic interests (Karat, 2016, *ibid*) was evident in former Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter’s speech to the Council of Foreign Relations, New York just before his journey to New Delhi (*America’s Growing Security Network in the Asia–Pacific*, US Department of Defence, 8 April 2016, online at <http://www.defense.gov>).

“Peace and stability in the Asia–Pacific has never been maintained by a region wide alliance like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ... Instead, regional security, stability and prosperity have required nations working together less formally and the United States has been an important builder, cementer and participant in this arrangement. Today, as the region changes, the United States is augmenting bilateral relationships and alliances with trilateral and multilateral arrangements and weaving these partnerships together to more effectively bolster American and regional security. This network—with its shared values, habits of cooperation and compatible and complementary capabilities—will expand the reach of all, responsibly share the security burden and help ensure the peace and stability in the region for the years to come”.

The Indo–US deal kept India’s sovereign right to test a nuclear device in the future intact and encouraged it to divert locally obtained fissile material to build-up a large stockpile of nuclear weapons. Such relaxation was motivated by the wish to contain China’s rise.

The unequivocal mention of “American security” was the summation of all the diplomatic arithmetic, diligently calculated by American policymakers in the aftermath of Pokhran II. The deal allowed, as mentioned previously, for a region specific accommodation, by breaking the spirit of non-alignment and nipping in the bud India’s ability to become an independent great power.

A NORMATIVE LOSS

While material capabilities have always been the potential markers of great power status, so are recognition and acceptance, as a state depends to a great extent on its normative self-image. Contra classical realism, neo-classical realists argue that “the pursuit is induced neither by a diabolical will to dominate nor by the structure of international anarchy”. There exists a much greater degree of flexibility in explaining how and why a particular state seeks to enhance power (Brian C Schmidt, “Competing Realist Conception of Power”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol33, no3, 2005, p546). Indian foreign policy displayed similar traits observable in New Delhi’s denial of the saccharine endorsements of the US led West’s multilateral treaties. Nuclear disarmament was one of the most important diplomatic pursuits of Indian foreign policy in the aftermath of independence (Rajesh Rajagopalan, “Multilateralism in India’s Nuclear Policy: A Questionable Default Option” in Malone, Raja Mohan and Raghavan, *ibid*, p653). Nehru’s unequivocal endorsement followed by acceptance of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 (*ibid*, p657) lent credence to India’s negative posturing towards nuclear weapons. Similarly, India’s opposition to the highly discriminatory NPT was in tune with its international self-image as a normative power endowed with the ability to challenge any deviance from the exalted discourses of ethics and morality in international politics. Overt nuclearisation in 1998 however undermined the normative undertone of Indian foreign policy, as the tests were “status and not threat driven” (Achin Vanaik, *After the Bomb: Reflection on India’s Nuclear Journey*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2015, p32). They displayed a particular manifestation of India’s unhappiness with its ascribed status in the international system (TV Paul, “The Systemic Bases of India’s Challenge to the Global Nuclear Order”, *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol6, no1, 1998, pp1–11), which logically coalesced with the self-perceptions of political elites whose pursuit of the notion of global great power

status for India seemed unencumbered by moral–social responsibility (Vanaik, *ibid*, p32). The tests highlighted the iniquity of the NPT and proved that norms and ethics are the first to be slaughtered at the altar of the global aspirations of sovereign nation-states.

The Nuclear Suppliers Group’s (NSG) waiver granted to India in 2008 under the aegis of the nuclear deal with the US, ending a three-decade old denial and facilitating India’s trade in nuclear fuel and technology with other member states, was a major blow to the spirit of disarmament and horizontal non-proliferation (Reshmi Kazi, “India, NSG and the Chinese Impasse”, *E-International Relations*, 20 July 2016, online at <http://www.e-ir.info>). Given the perfidious behaviour of nuclear weapon states towards the NPT and their failure

to live up to the bargain embodied in Articles I, IV and VI (Vanaik, *ibid*, p152), an aspiring state like India should not have circumvented unequal multilateral conventions holding America’s hand. Indian policymakers failed to understand that the US, in pursuit of its own post-Cold War era goals, deliberately sought to undermine the NPT, piggybacking on subordinate allies like India. New Delhi’s desire to join the NSG was initially endorsed by Barack Obama in 2010 followed by the 2011 communication paper sent to the NSG entitled “Food for Thought”, explicitly asking to accommodate India in the group by calling it a “like-minded partner” (Kazi, 2016, *ibid*).

The communiqué emphasised that the “Procedural Arrangement does not warrant the candidate to meet all of the stated criteria”, including the NPT (*ibid*). However, India’s recent bid to secure permanent membership of the NSG without signing the NPT has met its Waterloo. All the pre-summit diplomatic efforts went in vain courtesy China’s obstreperous opposition and the zeal of other states to oppose any digression from established rules and norms. The failed bid clearly signalled New Delhi’s diplomatic dependence on Washington,

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leading to an unambiguous hyphenation of India as the latter's ally in the region. This also opened a Pandora's Box on the subcontinent by furthering diplomatic cooperation between Pakistan and China in response. Given their territorial contiguity with India, this could lock the country in the regional security architecture leaving it as a great market instead of a great power.

CONCLUSION

Nuclear weapons are a double edged sword. Their presence in the military arsenal of a country, especially a rising one seeking great power status, leads to mixed responses from the rest of the world. The immediate neighbourhood either acquiesces to the possession of the strategic assets or clamours for possession as well, as happened in the case of India where Pakistan followed suit. Such circumstances lead to the addition of the word "strategic" to the phrase "regional security architecture" and appears to be the first major impediment for the state seeking great power status. The hegemon's response depends on the diplomatic goals it is pursuing. If the power seeker offers diplomatic and security dividends to the hegemon, it is more likely to be accommodated under the semantics of "ally", "strategic partner", "pivot" or "like-minded" state. If it poses a threat, it is likely to face crippling sanctions or a diplomatic tour of the Swiss Alps to sign a multilateral agreement. In both cases, the chances of graduating from a regional or middle power to a great power are heavily curtailed. ❧