

# **Towards a Nuclear-Weapons-Free and Non-violent World Order**

**by**  
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India is now a Nuclear Weapon State (NWS). Further, it has affirmed its intention to maintain a credible minimum nuclear deterrent.

How does this affect the Action Plan for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free and Non-violent World Order submitted by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the Third Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly at New York **on** 19 June 1988?\*

Soon after the nuclear weapons test at Pokharan in May 1988, the Indian National Congress affirmed that the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan remained the "sheet anchor" of the external dimension of the Party's nuclear weapons policy. The Party then undertook an exercise to update and present in treaty language a draft convention incorporating the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan. This draft was formally submitted to the Secretary General of the United Nations by the Congress President in 2001.\*\*

In his statement to Parliament on 29 July 2005, the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, said:

"Our commitment to work for universal nuclear disarmament, so passionately espoused by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in the long run will remain our core concern."

Subsequently, replying to a debate in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) on 17 August 2006, the Prime Minister said:

"Our commitment towards non-discriminatory global nuclear disarmament remains unwavering, in line with the Rajiv. Gandhi Action Plan. There is no dilution on this count. We do not accept proposals put forward from time to time for regional non-proliferation or regional disarmament. Pending nuclear disarmament, there is no question of India joining the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons State, or accepting full-scope safeguards as a requirement for nuclear supplies to India, now or in the future."

He further added:

"Our support for global nuclear disarmament remains unwavering. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had put forward an Action Plan in the 1988 UNGA Special Session on Disarmament. We remain committed to the central goal of this Action Plan, that is, complete elimination of nuclear weapons leading to global nuclear disarmament in a time-bound framework."

Soon after assuming the office of Minister of External Affairs, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, in an interview to *The Hindu*, published on 21 November 2006, said:

"We are committed to non-proliferation and disarmament. What Rajiv Gandhi said at the special session on disarmament of the United Nation [9 June 1988] is the guiding principle of our foreign policy. He told the world that we would not graduate ourselves from the threshold level – that was our position then, before 1998. We want that those who have nuclear weapons should stop proliferation – vertically, horizontally – reduce stockpiles and have a time-bound action plan [for disarmament]. And that [commitment] stands. In between, of course, we have gone for the [May 1998 nuclear] explosions. There have been developments and that cannot be erased. It has already taken place – but even in that context we are serious and we are engaging ourselves. In this United Nations session, we are going to move a resolution to this effect [for time-bound disarmament]"

It will thus be seen that for sixty years, India has been consistent in pleading for universal disarmament:

- This was sought for the 27 years between 1947 and 1974 when India had not undertaken any nuclear tests.
- It remained so after the first series of tests at Pokharan in 1974 which established India as a threshold NWS.
- And it has remained so since India became an NWS in 1998.

### **Mahatma Gandhi**

The origins of this consistency in pressing for universal nuclear disarmament begin with Mahatma Gandhi's revulsion at the first use of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945:

"I did not move a muscle when I first heard that the atom bomb had wiped out Hiroshima. On the contrary, I said to myself, "Unless the world now adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind".

The Mahatma urged:

"The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the Bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bombs, even as violence cannot be destroyed by counter-violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred."

Writing in his magazine *Harijan*, on 7 July 1946, about a year after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Gandhiji said:

"It is being suggested by American friends that the atom bomb will bring in *Ahimsa* (non-violence) as nothing else can. It is meant that its destructive power will so disgust the world that it will turn it away from violence for the time being. This is very like a man glutting himself with dainties to the point of nausea and turning away from it only to return with a redoubled zeal after the effect of nausea is well over. Precisely in the same manner will the world return to violence with renewed zeal after the effect of disgust is worn out."

How prescient! For a while, from time to time, there has been a surge of public opinion and governmental concern over nuclear weapons even in Nuclear Weapons States, the sad fact is that such sporadic surges of anti-nuclear weapons sentiment have generally given way to acquiescence or even assertion of the need for such weapons. This only validates the next paragraph in Gandhiji's article of July 1946:

"So far as I can say, the atomic bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages. There used to be the so-called laws of war which made it tolerable. Now we know the naked truth. War knows no law except that of might."

Returning again to this theme on 16 November 1947, a few months after India became independent, Gandhiji wrote:

"In this age of the atom bomb, unadulterated non-violence is the only force that can confound the tricks of violence put together."

When asked whether the atomic bomb had not rendered non-violence obsolete, Gandhiji returned an emphatic "No", adding:

"On the contrary, non-violence is the only thing that is left in the field. It is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy."

### **Jawaharlal Nehru**

Building on the legacy of the Mahatma, Jawaharlal Nehru envisaged a twin-track policy. On the one hand, India had to harness its scientific and technological talent in the campaign for what was then called "Atoms for Peace" and, on the other hand, India had to be in the forefront also of the campaign for nuclear disarmament.

Indeed, as early as 1940, Jawaharlal Nehru, in a confidential note penned for the use of the inner councils of the Congress Party had written:

"Both because of our adherence to the principle of non-violence and from practical considerations arising from our understanding of world events, we believe that complete disarmament of all national states should be aimed at, and is in fact an urgent necessity if the world is not to be reduced to barbarism."

Jawaharlal Nehru's reaction to the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki paralleled Gandhiji's. He expressed his dismay at the "disastrous path that modern civilization is following", and added:

"Two great wars have brutalized humanity and made them think more and more in terms of violence. What progress, scientific, cultural and in human values we have made, is somehow twisted to the needs of violence."

In 1954, after the atom bomb had been overtaken by the hydrogen bomb, Jawaharlal Nehru, stressing that "the way of the atom bomb is not the way of peace or freedom" told the Indian Parliament:

"We have maintained that nuclear (including thermonuclear), chemical and biological (bacterial) knowledge and power should not be used to forge these weapons of mass destruction. We have advocated the prohibition of such weapons, by common consent, and immediately by agreement amongst those concerned, which latter is at present the only effective way to bring about their abandonment."

(Lok Sabha, 2 April 1954)

## **Indira Gandhi**

On 18 May 1974, India carried out an underground nuclear explosion experiment at a depth of 100 metres in the Rajasthan desert. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, clarifying to the Indian Parliament that "this experiment was part of the research and development work which the Atomic Energy Commission has been carrying on in pursuance of our national objective of harnessing atomic energy for peaceful purposes", said:

"No technology is evil in itself; it is the use that nations make of technology which determines its character. India does not accept the principle of apartheid in any matter and technology is no exception."

This view was in keeping with the point made by Mahatma Gandhi:

"That atomic energy, though harnessed by American scientists and army men for destructive purposes, may be utilized by other scientists for humanitarian purposes is undoubtedly within the realm of possibility."

And no one better realized this than Jawaharlal Nehru who initiated our programme of Atoms for Peace at the very dawn of Independence:

"It is perfectly clear that atomic energy can be used for peaceful purposes, to the immense advantage of humanity. It may take some years before it can be used more or less economically (but) the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes is far more important for a country like India whose power resources are limited than for an industrially advanced country."

In this light, having rejected the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1967 as an unequal treaty and undertaken the nuclear explosion at Pokharan in 1974, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi went on to lead the most significant disarmament initiative of the Eighties – the Five-Continent/Six-Nation Initiative – the tone for which was set by her immortal address to the Seventh Non-Aligned Summit in New Delhi at which she asked the key question:

"Can there be peace alongside nuclear weapons?"

She answered the question herself:

"Each day, each hour, the size and lethality of nuclear weapons increase. The hood of the cobra is spread. Humankind watches in frozen fear, hoping against hope that it

will not strike. Never before has the earth faced so much death and danger. The destructive power contained in nuclear stockpiles can kill human life, indeed all life, many times over and might prevent its reappearance for ages to come. Terrifying is the vividness of such descriptions by scientists. Yet, some statesmen and strategists act as though there is not much difference between these and earlier artillery pieces."

She then joined the Six-Nation appeal broadcast on 22 May 1984 which said:

"The probability of nuclear holocaust increases and warning time decreases and the weapons become swifter, more accurate and more deadly. The rush towards global suicide must be stopped. We urge (a) halt (to) all testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, to be immediately followed by substantial reductions in nuclear forces. We are convinced that it is possible to work out the details of an arrangement along these lines that takes into account the interests and concerns of all, and contains adequate measures for verification. This first step must be followed by a continuing programme of arms reductions leading to general and complete disarmament..."

### **Rajiv Gandhi**

On becoming Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi quickly established himself as an impassioned campaigner for universal nuclear disarmament, a campaign which reached its apotheosis in the Action Plan he presented to the United Nations in 1988.

The Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan combines a practical roadmap towards universal, non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament (leading to general disarmament) and sustaining this by basing the world order on the principles of non-violence. The heart of the Action Plan lies in its emphasis of both a "nuclear-weapons-free" world and a "non-violent world order" to sustain it.

Rajiv Gandhi's Action Plan was the culmination of forty years of intensive exploration of the road to nuclear disarmament. The heart of the Action Plan lay in the elimination of all nuclear weapons in three stages over a period of twenty-two years. Eighteen of these twenty-two years have passed with no progress even in the direction of the first stage. But abstracting from the specific time lines suggested in 1988, the three stages continue to remain valid. These are:

- First, a binding commitment by all nations to eliminate nuclear weapons in stages within a specific time frame.
- Second, the participation of all Nuclear Weapon States in the process of nuclear disarmament, while ensuring that all other countries are also part of the process.
- Third, the demonstration of tangible progress at each stage towards the common goal.

The Action Plan further required that with a view to sustaining a world free of nuclear weapons, negotiations be undertaken to establish a comprehensive Global Security System under the aegis of the United Nations. To once again quote Rajiv Gandhi:

"When we eliminate nuclear weapons and reduce conventional forces to minimum defensive levels, the establishment of a non-violent world order is the only way of not relapsing into the irrationalities of the past. It is the only way of precluding the recommencement of an armaments spiral. Non-violence in international relations cannot be considered a Utopian goal. It is the only available basis for civilized survival, for the maintenance of peace through peaceful coexistence, for a new, just, equitable and democratic world order."

The arguments brought forward by Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 bear repetition even now, notwithstanding the enormous changes that have taken place in the international scenario over the last two decades and the fact that in the interim India herself has moved from being a threshold nuclear power to a full-fledged NWS:

- First, now as in 1988, nuclear war will mean the extinction of thousands of millions of human beings and the end of life as we know it on our Planet Earth.
- Second, the relentless march of nuclear weapons technology renders ever more obsolete the pre-nuclear calculus of war and peace. **As Robert S. McNamara has pointed out in a celebrated 2005 article in *Foreign Policy*, there are nearly 10,000 strategic offensive nuclear warheads in deployment world-wide, half of them by the United States with "the average US warhead (having) a destructive power 20 times that of the Hiroshima bomb."** In consequence, as Jawaharlal Nehru put it several decades earlier:

"These weapons, and the magnitude in which they will be employed, have erased the difference between the capacity to inflict punishment and receiving the same; for the

side that employs them is not immune from the lethal effects of their own offence. It is a dangerous illusion to believe that nuclear weapons have brought us peace."

- Third, as Rajiv Gandhi told the U.N.:

"There can be no iron-clad guarantee against the use of weapons of mass destruction. They have been used in the past. They could be used in the future. And, in this nuclear age, the insane logic of mutually assured destruction will ensure that nothing survives, that no one lives to tell the tale, that there is no one left to understand what went wrong and why."

- Fourth, as for the argument that since the consequences of nuclear war are widely known and well understood, therefore nuclear war just cannot happen, it is again worthwhile to revisit Rajiv Gandhi's answer to that argument:

"History is full of miscalculations. Perceptions are often totally at variance with reality. A madman's fantasy could unleash the end. An accident could trigger off a chain reaction which inexorably leads to doom."

The cautionary point made by McNamara in this regard is worth repeating:

"The whole situation seems so bizarre as to be beyond belief. On any given day, as we go about our business, the President (of the United States) is prepared to make a decision within twenty minutes that could launch one of the most devastating weapons in the world."

- Fifth, there is also little logic to the argument that as nuclear weapons have been invented, they, therefore, cannot be eliminated. There are several conventions already in operation relating to biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. Only nuclear weapons remain outside the purview of a universal ban on weapons of mass destruction. The Action Plan signposts the stages by which nuclear disarmament too can be secured.
- Sixth, it remains as true today as it did in 1988, that, as Rajiv Gandhi put it:  
"There is nothing more dangerous than the illusion of limited nuclear war. It desensitises inhibitions about the use of nuclear weapons that could lead, in next to no time, to the outbreak of full-fledged nuclear war."

In 1988, the challenge of the Action Plan was essentially to doctrines of nuclear deterrence. That was at a time when two relatively well-matched "super-powers" were assuring their mutual survival by ensuring their mutual destruction. Now that hostility has given way to

normalization of relations between the two principal NWS, and all the self-certified NWS recognized by the NPT are promoting the best of relations among themselves, it is not so much the argument over the validity of deterrence doctrines as the need for the continued existence of weapons of mass destruction that takes centre-stage in consideration of issues of nuclear disarmament.

Who are these weapons to be used against? Terrorists is one answer. But terrorists are non-State actors - and nuclear weapons are for use, if they are for use at all, only against hostile States or peoples. No one could suggest that the right response to a terrorist strike from a terrorist hideout could be a nuclear response. Indeed, the continued existence of large reserves of nuclear weaponry is the very treasure trove from which the terrorist hopes to filch his weapon of terror. Terrorism has, of course, to be fought but nuclear weapons can hardly be the weapon of choice.

The threat of nuclear proliferation will remain so long as an unequal world nuclear order legitimises the possession of such weapons in some hands, and those hands threaten the use of these weapons as a way of containing the threat of proliferation. The present juncture of a world without acute rivalries among the NWS is the right juncture at which to initiate an earnest dialogue under the aegis of the United Nations at the Conference on Disarmament based on the key concepts of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan that could lead to the realization of the dashed hopes of the last two decades.

To this end, the Indian delegation to the 2006 of the U.N. General session Assembly circulated a Working Paper through which it reminded the international community that the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan "provided a holistic framework seeking negotiations for a time-bound commitment for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons to usher in a world free of nuclear weapons and rooted in non-violence." With this in view, the Working Paper calls on the international community "to build a consensus that strengthens the ability of the international community to initiate concrete steps towards achieving the goal of nuclear disarmament based on the following elements:

- Reaffirmation of the unequivocal commitment of all nuclear weapon States to the goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons;
- Reduction of the salience of nuclear weapons in security doctrines;

- Taking into account the global reach and menace of nuclear weapons, adoption of measures by nuclear-weapon States to reduce nuclear danger, including the risks of accidental war, de-alerting of nuclear-weapons to prevent unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons;
- Negotiations of a global agreement among nuclear weapon States on 'no-first-use' of nuclear weapons;
- Negotiation of a universal and legally-binding agreement on non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons States;
- Negotiation of a Convention on the complete prohibition of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;
- Negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Conventions prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to the global non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified timeframe.

The participants in this International Conference convened to celebrate the Centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha are invited to lend their voice to a **renewal of the momentum towards universal non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament by endorsing the Working Paper to open negotiations aimed at securing an intelligent consensus which might yet save humanity.**