

No First Use Nuclear Doctrine

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In News

A nuclear doctrine states how a nuclear weapon state would employ its nuclear weapons both during peace and war. By communicating to the enemy its stated intentions and resolve, **nuclear doctrines help states to establish deterrence vis-à-vis its adversary during peace and once deterrence fails, guides the state's response during war.**

India's Nuclear Doctrine

- After the successful completion of the nuclear tests in 1998, India adopted a “no first use” policy. The government had asserted then the **arsenal would only be used as a nuclear deterrent**. The government after the tests retaliated India's stance that it would want a world to be “free of nuclear weapons”, but **reserved the right to retaliate if attacked by another country**. The stance has more or less remained the same over the years.
- In January 2003, the government released its first official nuclear doctrine. It has 3 primary components:
 - . **No First Use:** India will only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack on Indian territory, or Indian forces. A caveat is made about their **possible use in response to a chemical or biological attack**.
 - . **Massive Retaliation:** India's response to a first strike will be massive, to **cause unacceptable damage**. While the doctrine doesn't explicitly espouse a counter-value strategy (civilian targets), the wording implies the same.
 - . **Credible Minimum Deterrence:** The number and capabilities of India's nuclear weapons and delivery systems should **merely be**

sufficient to ensure intolerable retaliation, also keeping in mind first-strike survival of its relatively meager arsenal.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

- After Communist China conducted the nuclear tests in October 1964, **the five nuclear powers (US, USSR, UK, France, and China) had tried to impose the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968 on the rest of the world.**
- Three main objectives of the treaty are **non-proliferation, disarmament, and the right to peacefully use nuclear technology.**
- India always considered the NPT as **discriminatory and had refused to sign it.**

Advantages of No First Use Policy

- The NFU policy facilitates a restrained nuclear weapons programme **without tactical weapons and a complicated command and control system.**
- The doctrine minimises the probability of nuclear use by avoiding the deployment of weapons on hair-trigger alert and **keeping the arms-race in check.**
- Strict adherence to the doctrine can strengthen **India's efforts to gain membership in the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC).**
- Despite being a non-signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, India's declared NFU pledge has contributed towards **legitimising itself as a nuclear power**, evinced in the Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver and Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement.

Implications of abandoning NFU for India

- India is now a member of most of the technology denial regimes such as the Missile Technology Control regime (MTCR) and the Wassenaar Arrangement. It is also actively pursuing full membership of the Nuclear

Suppliers Group(NSG). Revoking the 'no first use' pledge would **harm India's nuclear image worldwide.**

- Withdrawing the NFU policy and making a declaration to that effect such a step will **abrogate India's commitment to the universal goal of nuclear disarmament and upset the regional balance in the sub-continent.**
- Abrogating the doctrine would signal a first use posture by India, thus reducing the space for conventional warfare below the nuclear threshold.
- This could also severely **corrode India's ability to limit Pakistan's offensive tactics** and policies at the conventional level.
- The decision to abandon the doctrine can send a deliberate **signal of provocation to China.**
- Nuclear preemption is a **costly policy** as it requires massive investment not only in weapons and delivery systems but also intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) infrastructure.