

General Studies – 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management

'No First Use' Nuclear Weapons Policy

1) Introduction

- Countries possessing nuclear weapons have evolved their doctrines based on the historical experiences shaping their world views, their threat perceptions and security obligations.
- No First Use (NFU) is a pledge by a nuclear power not to use nuclear weapons unless it is attacked by an adversary with the use of nuclear weapons.
- India has always held its commitment to NFU policy as proof of it being a responsible nuclear power.
- No first use is a reflection of our cultural inheritance

2) Indian conceptualisation of weapons

- **India's Nuclear Doctrine**
 - a) Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent
 - b) Posture of 'No First Use', nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian Territory or on Indian forces anywhere
 - c) Nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage
 - d) Non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states
 - e) In the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons
- "Credible minimum deterrent" and "no first use" — were first articulated by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on May 27, 1998, days after India had undertaken a series of five nuclear tests in Pokhran and declared it a nuclear weapon state.
- India did not see nuclear weapons as weapons of war; that their role was to ensure that India is not subjected to nuclear threats or coercion

3) The advantages of an NFU policy

- A 'no first use' nuclear weapons policy suits India's interest. Shifting to a first-use policy would mark a shift from deterrence towards nuclear war fighting
- These weapons are enormously destructive and should not be used.
- Since there is no first use alert requirement, the chances of reacting to a false alarm are nullified
- A first use would result in international dishonour and weigh heavily on a country with a first use posture.
- NFU doctrine is cheaper to implement; for India, which has many economic targets to achieve, this is a very important factor.
- NFU policy is just right for India as it ensures security for the nation and does not detract it from its march towards better prosperity for its people.
- India's NFU policy which has kept the nuclear arsenal in both India and Pakistan in a de-mated posture, which means that the nuclear warheads are not mated with the delivery systems.

4) Arguments against 'No First Use' Policy

- The conventional criticism against a 'no first use' policy is that India would have to suffer a first strike before it retaliated.
- Critics of the NFU policy argue that the increasing stockpile of Pakistani nuclear weapons and China's expansionist designs in the region warrant a change in the doctrine.
- A major worry for India is a two-front war when both China and Pakistan collude and simultaneously launch offensives. In case India faces severe adversity, its traditional nuclear doctrine of NFU may not be ideal.

5) China and Pakistan Card

- India's doctrine does not mention any country, but it is no secret that the Indian nuclear arsenal is to counter threats from China and Pakistan.
- China has maintained a 'no first use' policy since 1964 when it went nuclear, and the Chinese leadership has always considered nuclear weapons as political weapons.
- Pakistan has adopted a first-use policy to ensure full-spectrum deterrence
- Pakistan knows that it cannot afford to use any nuclear weapons in a war, including its tactical nuclear weapons, as India would respond with massive nuclear retaliation as per its doctrine

6) Implications of a policy change (From NFU to First Use)

- It would mark a shift from deterrence towards nuclear war fighting
- It would lead to greater instability on either side
- The same instability would govern a situation of nuclear ambiguity.
- A shift towards nuclear war fighting also blurs the dividing line between conventional and nuclear.
- First-use policy would virtually destroy India's chances of getting NSG membership
- while the NFU policy is not explicitly articulated in the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, the political climate of South Asia could even force the US to consider a review if India drops its stand on first use.
- India going back on NFU policy will be an embarrassment because India has always been vocal about nuclear disarmament.
- As far as Pakistan is concerned, going back on the NFU policy may actually escalate the already tense situation.
- A first strike policy may increase the chances of nuclear terrorism in Pakistan, something India should avoid
- If India goes back on its NFU policy, it makes it more likely that China will also see less reason to continue its own NFU policy, leading to more tension in South Asia.

7) Way Forward

- India must ensure that deterrence does not fail, and that there is a clear communication to the adversary of the certainty of punitive nuclear retaliation.
- India's nuclear doctrine should be periodically reviewed and updated, possibly every decade or so, taking into account technological developments and changes in the security environment.
- Instead of focusing on adopting a first strike policy, India must work towards strengthening its counter strike and second strike capability.
- India's third leg, its sea based nuclear deterrence, must be strengthened at the earliest

8) Conclusion

- Mature nations always pursue a NFU policy. In the present strategic context, there is no necessity for India to change its existing nuclear doctrine.
- As India seeks to establish its credentials in the international comity as a responsible nation and a growing economic power, it should also project the same by means of its nuclear doctrine.
- New Delhi must take the effort of making its neighbours believe in its nuclear doctrine through effective confidence building measures.

