14 Should India Sign the NPT/CTBT?¹
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1 INDIA’S NUCLEAR QUANDARY

First the NPT, and then the CTBT. While India had always opposed the Non-Proliferation Treaty since its inception in 1968, does it make sense for India to oppose the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty finalized in 1996? India had always supported such a treaty ever since it was first considered in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, India was one of the earliest advocates of this Treaty back when Jawaharlal Nehru was its prime minister.

Like the widespread opposition to the NPT that spanned ideology and party affiliation, whether politician, bureaucrat, journalist, academic, or other profession, the opposition to the CTBT in 1996 was overwhelming. The Indian Foreign Minister, I.K. Gujral, stated that ‘India remains committed to elimination of all nuclear weapons and bringing forth a genuine and comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty’.² Gujral demanded that the pact should ‘outlaw not only nuclear weapons testing but also non-explosive techniques for refinement of nuclear weapons’, a reference to the fact that the CTBT would outlaw all nuclear weapons testing but allow for simulated tests in the laboratory. This official Indian opposition to the CTBT was greeted in nearly all Indian circles of the attentive public as a ‘principled stand’. A leading Indian news daily called the Indian position on the CTBT one of ‘Splendid Isolation’.³

The Indian refusal to sign the CTBT brought about an even greater emotional response in Pakistan. During the summer of 1996, 15 opposition groups in Pakistan warned Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s government that ‘there should be no unilateral signature by Pakistan on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and any rollback of the [Pakistani] nuclear programme would be unacceptable’.⁴ Munawwar Hasan, the secretary-general of the right wing Jamaat-i-Islami Party declared that if Pakistan signed the CTBT, ‘the people would come out on the streets to oppose it. ...We think that the nuclear issue is a life-and-death matter for Pakistan.’⁵ Similar warnings had been issued earlier against the NPT by
the leader of the Jamaat-i-Islami, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, who warned that any Pakistani leader who signed the NPT would be ‘lynched’.6

India’s opposition to the CTBT in 1996 rides on two considerations. First, India’s idea of a CTBT was really a Comprehensive Nuclear Disarmament Treaty (a CNDT), or at least the first part of a two-stage process whereby nuclear testing would be banned followed by complete universal nuclear disarmament. A CTBT and CNDT was to be inextricably linked. The finalized CTBT in 1996 provides for no time table for the next stage, a CNDT. The NPT at least had Article VI which called for comprehensive nuclear disarmament even if Article VI was ignored by the nuclear ‘haves’ throughout the Cold War because they found it inconvenient. Only towards the end of the Cold War did the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks become the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks. And it was only following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the near economic collapse of Russia, that the US was willing to push for considerable nuclear disarmament but short of comprehensive nuclear disarmament. Russia is now virtually subservient to the West because it is dependent on the West for economic loans, grants and investments. India can no longer play the Soviet/Russian card.

As far as India was concerned, the end of the Cold War had not changed its strategic environment and threat perceptions substantially. On the one hand, the Chinese nuclear threat remains. And on the other hand, there continues to exist three ‘White’ nuclear weapons states as part of the Western alliance to which in all likelihood a fourth one, Russia, may be added when its ‘Partnership for Peace’ merges into NATO. It may be recalled that following the Indian atomic test of 1974, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan had reportedly said that there was a Christian bomb (US, Britain and France), a Marxist bomb (Soviet Union and China), a Jewish bomb (Israel’s bombs-in-the-basement) and now a Hindu bomb (India), but no Muslim bomb. Likewise, India could possibly complain now that there were four White bombs, one Yellow or Beige bomb, but no Brown or Black bombs, an unfair and unacceptable situation. While China may continue to show some defiance against the policies of the West on occasion, the nuclear distribution indicated the continuing domination of the traditional White imperialists in an overwhelmingly non-White world.

Second, there is a simple explanation for India’s strong opposition to the CTBT. If India were to sign the CTBT, it would amount to signing the NPT which India has hitherto opposed because it wishes to retain the nuclear weapons option. After all, India’s opposition to the NPT was because of its discriminatory nature between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, and