



Unclear doctrine

No-first-use is integral to India's nuclear doctrine and leaves no space for ambiguity

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has been somewhat careful in speaking of envisioning a change in India's nuclear deterrence posture. In place for 16 years, since January 4, 2003, when the doctrine was adopted formally, New Delhi has said consistently that India's nuclear weapons were based on staggering and punitive retaliation, in case deterrence failed. The retaliation to a nuclear strike, any nuclear strike, whether by tactical or theatre weapons or something bigger, would be crushing enough to deter the possible use of nuclear weapons by an adversary. So the theory goes. On the first death anniversary of former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, and in the nuclear proving ground in Pokhran, the Minister said two things: that the no-first-use has served India well so far, and that what happens in future depends on circumstances. There ought to be no scope for confusion here. Security is, after all, a dynamic concept. It was the security environment in the neighbourhood coupled with the pressure brought by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that forced India out of the nuclear closet and, at the same time, to adopt the no-first-use posture. The structures associated with the doctrine, the command and control that can survive a nuclear strike, the redundancies that are in-built, the secure communications, have all been developed keeping in view the posture perspective.

But there is a danger that the minister's remark could spark off a nuclear arms race, given the strategic paranoias that have been at work in this part of the world for over half a century. In the elections of 2014, the BJP's manifesto had references to an intention to update and revise the nuclear doctrine, but that went nowhere. It is conceivable that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of non-state actors in Pakistan, but even in such scenarios that warrant pre-emptive action, a nuclear strike cannot be a viable option. It would have been much better if Mr. Singh had elaborated on his thoughts so that a debate could have taken place, and not kept his remarks enigmatic. In a nuclear circumstance it is much better to convey the overwhelming nature of the deterrence than to keep the potential adversary guessing. In this respect it is a good idea for the government to make public any periodic review in its strategic posture. The no-first-use policy comes with being a confident nuclear power. For him to state the future is open is to say nothing and at once imply everything. In matters of nuclear doctrine, it is important to be clear above all else. Nothing must be left to interpretation.

Taking on TB

Keeping the prices of the new drug low is essential for increased treatment uptake

The anti-tuberculosis drug pretomanid recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will be a game changer for treating people with extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) and those who do not tolerate or respond to now available multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) drugs. That pretomanid is only the third drug in the last 40 years to get FDA approval highlights the scarcity of new drugs to treat TB bacteria that are rapidly developing resistance against most available drugs. The all-oral, three-drug regimen of bedaquiline, pretomanid, and linezolid (BPaL) had a 90% cure rate in a phase III trial in South Africa involving 109 participants. In contrast, the current treatment success rate for XDR-TB and MDR-TB is about 34% and 55%, respectively. Importantly, the regimen was found to be safe and effective in curing TB in people living with HIV. The safety and efficacy were tested in 1,168 patients in 19 clinical trials in 14 countries. Unlike 18-24 months needed to treat highly-resistant TB using nearly 20 drugs, the BPaL regimen took just six months, was better tolerated and more potent in clearing the bacteria. The shorter duration is more likely to increase adherence to therapy and improve treatment outcomes. According to the World Health Organisation, in 2017, there were an estimated 4.5 lakh people across the world with MDR-TB, of which India accounted for 24%, and about 37,500 with XDR-TB. With only a low percentage of MDR-TB cases being treated, the actual number of people who do not tolerate or respond to available MDR-TB drugs and so will be eligible to receive the BPaL regimen is unknown. Though the total number of people who will require the new drug may not be high, these are people who have very little alternative treatment options that are safe and efficacious. Also, the number of those who would need a pretomanid-based regimen is increasing due to rising drug resistance.

While the availability of a potent drug is welcome news, it remains to be seen if it would be made affordable, particularly in the developing countries where the burden of XDR-TB and MDR-TB is the highest. TB Alliance, a New York-based international NGO, which developed and tested the drug, has already signed an exclusive licensing agreement with a generic-drug manufacturer for high-income markets. Unlike in the case of bedaquiline, where its prohibitive cost has severely restricted access especially in the developing countries, pretomanid might become affordable. In line with the TB Alliance's commitment to affordability and sustainable access, the drug will be licensed to multiple manufacturers in about 140 low- and middle-income countries, including India. Making the drug affordable to those with extreme form of drug resistance will be highly commendable and a desperately needed model to be followed. After all, there is a compulsion to keep the prices low and increase treatment uptake to stop the spread of highly drug-resistant TB bacteria. Studies have shown an increase in the number of new patients who are directly infected with drug-resistant bacteria.

'The Idea of India' is failing

The middle class that led India's nation-building project has now embraced a nationalism that has no place for diversity



C. RAMMANOHAR REDDY

The "Idea of India" has always been grander in promise than in fulfilment. At Independence, the dream was that the people of a country of so much diversity – in language, religion, and tradition – would enjoy constitutionally guaranteed rights and through democratic means, build a just society. A cornerstone of this dream was respect for diversity that was written into the Constitution. It has been a mixed record, with as many failures as achievements. The events of the past two weeks, however, signal to us that the "Idea of India" is in danger of collapsing. We may soon have to accept the "New India" which places no value on pluralism, fraternity and autonomy.

Everything about why and how the constitutional arrangements of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) have been so radically changed violates the "Idea of India".

A worrisome move

The processes used to modify the "Holy Book" that is the Constitution are as important as the content of the amendments. Yet, as many lawyers and constitutional experts have already pointed out, the manner in which the Narendra Modi government has withdrawn the rights J&K enjoyed under Article 370 can only be described as abusing the spirit of the Constitution. Now that the Government has tasted success, it should be fastidious about using the same kind of skulduggery to aggressive-

ly alter the Constitution to further its agenda. Only the courts stand in the way and there the Government of India must be feeling that its own actions will pass muster.

We also have the disappearance of J&K as a State. It is hard to think of anything more insulting to a people than to inform them one morning that their State has been turned into two Union Territories, effectively ruled from New Delhi. This is real "tukde tukde" work.

Since the early 1950s, States have been periodically divided and new ones created. Consultation of some form or the other has always been an integral part of the process. Nothing like the sudden disappearance of the State of J&K has happened before. In a supposedly federal system, the Centre has been able to ram through the necessary legislative changes while keeping 8 million people cut off from the rest of the world and without allowing them to express their views. In the past five years, we have undoubtedly had the most centralised government since the time of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Should we or shouldn't we be worried about what more is in store for us? Was it short-sightedness or fear that made all the regional parties – the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam being the only major exception – endorse the break up of J&K into two Union Territories?

Spirit behind special rights

There are legitimate reasons why in our diverse society, the Constitution has ordained special rights, for instance, for Dalits and Adivasis; for Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim (under Article 371); and so too for J&K until now under Article 370. A uniformity of rights across the nation and all classes does not necessarily make



NISSAR AHMAD

for a cohesive society. In fact, the opposite is the case in a country of vast diversity. Special rights for specific communities and regions enable them to feel a "oneness" in a large country that has so many kinds of differences. Here, the guarantees promised to J&K were especially important because of the circumstances surrounding the State's accession to India.

The autonomy offered by Article 370 has been contentious for two reasons. One, it was enjoyed by a State that remained divided between India and Pakistan. Two, the constitutional provision applied to India's only Muslim majority State. These two features should have made it all the more important to preserve the guarantees contained in Article 370. However, for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Jan Sangh/Bharatiya Janata Party, for whom uniformity has always come first, abolition of Article 370 has been a core demand.

Contentious Article 370 always was, but it was never adhered to in any measure. In this, there have been no saints in either New Delhi or Srinagar. If one systematically emptied the promise of autonomy right from the 1950s onwards with a series of presidential notifica-

An intervention that leads to more questions

Revoking NFU does not necessarily mean giving up restraint, but it leaves India's nuclear doctrine more ambiguous



PRIYANJALI MALIK

Policymaking by tweet may have arrived in India, for the Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, appears to have altered a key pillar of India's nuclear doctrine when he tweeted that India's 'future' commitment to a posture of No First Use of nuclear weapons 'depends on the circumstances'. Using the commemoration of the first death anniversary of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee as the setting for this declaration, Mr. Singh's announcement marks a significant revision of India's nuclear stance, seemingly without any prior structured deliberation or consultation. Of course nuclear doctrine, like any directive guiding national security, needs to be a dynamic concept that responds to changing circumstances. However, this raises the question of what has changed in India's strategic outlook that requires a revision of one of the two foundational pillars of its nuclear doctrine.

India is one of two countries – China being the other – that adheres to a doctrine of No First Use (NFU). Our knowledge of India's nuclear doctrine is based largely on a statement circulated on January 4, 2003 by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which said that it had 'reviewed progress in operationalising India's nuclear

doctrine', and was making public the relevant details as appropriate (summarised in seven points). The first said that India would maintain 'a credible minimum deterrent' and the second point avowed '[a] posture of "No First Use": nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation...'. The remaining five points flow mainly from these two points mentioned. India has maintained that it will not strike first with nuclear weapons but reserves the right to retaliate to any nuclear first strike against it (or any 'major' use of weapons of mass destruction against Indian forces anywhere) with a nuclear strike 'that will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage'. This is not a statement by the faint-hearted – with two nuclear neighbours, the NFU simply raises the nuclear threshold in order to bring stability into a volatile environment.

A rewind

It is almost exactly 20 years to the day since since any of this was first mentioned officially. On August 17, 1999, the then caretaker Bharatiya Janata Party government released a draft Nuclear Doctrine in order to generate discussion and debate on India's nuclear posture. There was much discussion and criticism of the doctrine, as indeed of the timing of the release of the draft, coming as it did just weeks before a national election. It was known that the first National Security Advisory Board, a group of 27 individuals convened by K. Subrahmanyam, and comprising strategic analysts, academics, and retired



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military and civil servants, had completed their draft some months earlier; however, their report was only released a couple of weeks before polling began on September 5, 1999.

It has ever been thus. Following criticism of the draft doctrine, the government appeared to move away from it. It was never discussed in Parliament and its status remained unclear for three and a half years until it was abruptly adopted by the CCS with minor modifications in 2003. The draft's emphasis on NFU, however, remained unchanged. The adoption of the nuclear doctrine came soon after Operation Parakram (2001-02), when the threat of a nuclear exchange on the subcontinent had figured prominently in international capitals, if not in New Delhi and Islamabad. The public adoption of the doctrine was in part an attempt by New Delhi to restate its commitment to restraint and to being a responsible nuclear power.

Restraint as a pivotal point

Restraint has served India well. India used the strategic space offered by its repeated proclamations of restraint to repulse the

intruders in Kargil 20 years ago and regain occupied land despite the nuclear shadow created by India and Pakistan's nuclear tests of 1998. Raising the nuclear threshold gave India the space for conventional operations and gained it sympathy in foreign capitals despite the fears of nuclear miscalculation that were widespread from Washington DC to London to Tokyo. India's self-proclaimed restraint has formed the basis for its claims to belong to the nuclear mainstream – from the initial application for the waiver in 2008 from the Nuclear Suppliers Group in order to carry out nuclear commerce with the grouping, to its membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group and its ongoing attempts to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

While revoking the commitment to NFU does not necessarily equate with abandoning restraint, it does leave India's doctrine more ambiguous. Ambiguity, in turn, can lead to miscalculations, as India found out with Kargil (1999), where it would appear that Rawalpindi misread India's resolve to carve out space for conventional military operations despite the new nuclear overhang. Neither does adhering to the NFU symbolise weakness, for India is committed to a devastating response to nuclear first use – a stance which underscores India's understanding of nuclear weapons as meant primarily to deter.

Of course, NFU has had its critics among those who advocate a

State that was the cause of so much armed conflict and terrorism.

The same middle class that seeded the freedom movement, which gave the ideas for a modern Constitution and then led the nation-building project around "The Idea of India", has now embraced an aggressive nationalism that dismisses the pluralism of India. We now do not seem to care one bit about what the people of Kashmir feel. We have been the least concerned the past fortnight about the lockdown they have been placed under. We openly talk about the possibility of buying up land in Kashmir. Lawmakers speak without being reprimanded about men from the rest of the country marrying "fair" Kashmiri women. And we look forward to effecting a demographic transformation in the Valley. How far we have travelled from when India drew up its Constitution.

There have been three days in the Republic's history on which "The Idea of India" has been shaken to its roots. The first was June 25, 1975 when an Emergency was declared and many of our Fundamental Rights were suspended. The people's vote rescued India at the time. The next was December 6, 1992 when the Babri Masjid was destroyed. We managed to limp away, though with neither atonement nor punishment. Now we have August 5, 2019, when the Constitution was subverted in spirit if not in letter, when federalism was shoved aside and the rights of the people of a member of the Union were stamped on.

It is difficult to see "The Idea of India" recovering from this latest body blow.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Kashmir's special status

The honourable Vice President of India begins his article (Editorial page, "A considered step that opens up new vistas", August 17) with the words, "The general perception is that a vast majority of people in the country feel that the abrogation is a welcome step" and sums it with the line, "In conclusion, it should be noted that the abrogation of Article 370 is a national issue involving our country's safety, security, unity and equitable prosperity. It is a step in the right direction that the Indian Parliament has taken with an overwhelming majority." Nowhere in the article have I come across a single line

about the wishes, the ascertainment of those wishes, or even the need for considering the wishes of the people directly and most affected by the action – I mean the people of the Kashmir Valley. Am I missing something?

SUSHIL PRASAD,
Hyderabad

■ The Constitution that India adopted in 1950 was a statement on how we will do things in the future. It is, above all, an ethical document that defines our values and guiding principles. We adopted democracy, a system where everyone's voice is heard and decisions are made by consensus. But the recent chain of events in Jammu and Kashmir have gone

against this basic principle. Democracy has been redefined as the rule of the majority, where even direct stakeholders have been sidelined. The principle that ends justify means can be found in many philosophical writings but it finds no place in the Constitution or Constitutional values. Any community is bound to be hurt by such humiliation and forced suppression. It seems the recent decisions have the potential to stoke the flames of instability in Jammu and Kashmir.

PRAKASH MATTHEW,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ The Vice President is right in pointing out that Article 370 was only a temporary, transitional arrangement. In the same vein, the provision

of reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was also meant to be a temporary measure. But even after more than 70 years of Independence, reservations continue with evidence of misuse. Will the Vice President use his good offices and see that the government addresses this issue also?

R. JAGADEESWARA RAO,
Visakhapatnam

A note on CSR

In mandating a corporate social responsibility spend under the Companies Act, we in India have followed a widely accepted global trend. But a prescriptive approach does not gel with a progressive nation. By its very concept, the CSR stands placed above mundane

finance; treating it as a tax is to degrade it. The annual CSR awards for companies should promote inclination and incentive to improving the social milieu. Instead of pedantic clauses, riders and ham-handed penalties, the government ought to facilitate and mould the groundswell. Contributions to the Prime Minister's relief fund are the most unimaginative route to CSR. Originality counts most as CSR is but a part of the tapestry of social empowerment

R. NARAYANAN,
Navi Mumbai

Special bond

Two reports from Kerala, "Pet dogs save goat herd amid Kerala floods" (August 18) and "Lone sentinel of

Kavalappara rescued" (August 17), once again prove that among the kinds of friendships in this world, some of the best happen to be those between people and animals. We are all creatures of this world and in heart-wrenching moments, animals end up showing us that love – especially unconditional love – really knows no bounds. Sometimes we even find more comfort in animals than we do with fellow humans because animals never seem to disappoint. This has been proven in various stories one reads about all creatures great and small.

SARADA NAIR,
Kochi

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