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*Striving for a
Nuclear Weapon
Free World*

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I t is a great privilege for me to be invited to be the speaker this year in this prestigious series of lectures instituted in memory of the Founder Director of the National Institute of Advanced Studies and a most distinguished son of the nation, Dr. Raja Ramanna. For those of us in my generation who were in the early, formative, years of their professional careers when Dr. Ramanna was at the helm of affairs in the atomic energy establishment, he was a model in so many ways – for the ease with which he straddled the proverbial 'two cultures', his quiet erudition and qualities of leadership, to name but a few. It is therefore a signal honour to have the opportunity of paying tribute to him through a presentation of one's own understanding of the current strategic security scenario. I do so in all humility, acutely conscious of the high standards of excellence, and mark of distinction, that he brought to bear in all that he did and associated with – the NIAS in particular, which has emerged as one of the premier centers of cross-disciplinary study in the country.

In choosing a subject for this lecture, the natural choice for me would have been a theme like “India and the IAEA”, having had the privilege of serving as the Governor for India on the Board of Governors of the IAEA and partaking, first hand, in the deliberations in this unique international organisation mandated to “accelerate and enlarge the peaceful uses of atomic energy”. Nuclear energy as a source of (electric) power, as compared to other fuel based alternatives such as coal or oil or gas, and renewables such as wind and hydel, has witnessed a remarkable resurgence in recent years, after having been virtually written off in some parts of the industrialised world due to concerns about the environment, safety and health particularly after the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents in 1979/86.

The IAEA has naturally been at the forefront of this return of nuclear energy to centre-stage, leading with dispassionately produced documentation on (the correct position regarding) the possibilities offered by nuclear technology amidst a welter of claims and counter-claims. That painstakingly thorough work played no mean a part in effecting a turn-around in public opinion hostile to anything 'nuclear' in the not too distant past in parts of the industrialised world.

India has made more than a modest contribution to this turn-around by readily sharing its experts and training facilities with the IAEA, even though it has itself had to forego benefiting from the IAEA's technical assistance programme because of a mindset mired in the NPT conundrum, within the IAEA as well as outside in the world at large.

A number of leading Indian scientists have chaired various high level IAEA Advisory Groups and Committees from time to time, and their work constitutes the bedrock of the IAEA's reputation as a neutral repository of expertise and experience in nuclear technology. Continuing in that tradition, Prof V.S.Ramamurthy, Director, NIAS, chaired the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nuclear Applications (SAGNA) until last year, being the latest Indian to head any of the IAEA's expert groups. His stewardship of the SAGNA was specially noted with appreciation by the (then) Director General, Dr. Mohammed El Baradei.

[It may not be out of place to also recall here that the ill fated flight that took Dr Bhabha's life in 1966, was taking him to Geneva enroute to Vienna to attend a meeting of the Scientific Advisory Group of the IAEA.]

It is the result of these and other contributions, and of course the comprehensive 'cradle-to-grave' capability in all aspects of nuclear technology built up in the nation over the years, that the Indian Ambassador to the IAEA walks tall in Vienna, widely sought after and solicited for advice and assistance in one respect or another.

Yet, if the theme chosen for this Lecture is 'Striving for a Nuclear Weapons Free World', instead of an elaboration of all the fascinating facets of the India-IAEA interaction briefly sketched above, it is not because India's engagement with the IAEA is not weighty enough but because of the undiminished importance of nuclear disarmament for international peace and security. Indeed, for the very survival of mankind. It is not necessary to dwell upon nuclear dangers, or explain them in detail, to an informed audience. We are all aware, I am sure, that life as we know it may not be able to survive a major nuclear conflagration, were it to break out anywhere on the globe in our present age of heavy reliance on intensive industrial, space communication and cyber systems. And the surviving, it has rightly been observed, may be left envying the dead in the wake of the havoc and horrendous suffering that is likely to be caused far and wide.

“Undiminished” here is with reference to the end of the Cold War in the early nineties. While the horror(s) of a nuclear holocaust were very much in the public eye prior to the collapse of the former Soviet Union (FSU), the nuclear tinder box receded from attention with the dissipation of the overarching political divide following the 'end of history' (as a famous American scholar put it, in rather dramatic and exaggerated terms in retrospect). There are understandable reasons for this recession in interest and concern – primarily, the big relief that the end of the 'eye-ball to eye-ball' confrontation between the two leading adversaries of the global arena brought about. Yet there is no justification for being complacent about the dangers or risk of a nuclear catastrophe. The political climate may have turned more benign, and the chances of outbreak of war might therefore have abated, but what about accidents involving nuclear weapons ? Can there be any guarantee against a mishap or mishandling ? Or miscalculation ? Those risks will always be there so long as nuclear weapons are around. Even with the best of 'understanding' between the defence establishments of adversaries, the chances of a misreading of each other's intentions and/or capabilities can never be ruled out. Several instances of 'near-misses' of these kinds and security lapses have come to light in recent years, both in the USA and in the FSU countries, when things almost went out of hand. This is not surprising – with time, the chances of Murphy's Law taking its toll increase, no matter what mechanisms, systems, drills and standard operating procedures are put in place to guard against slips and transgressions.

And all this without factoring in scenarios stemming from terrorist usurpation of nuclear weapons or release of radio-activity. In times menaced by terrorism, such possibilities can hardly be regarded as fanciful flights of imagination; they pose very real dangers that it would be the highest folly to ignore or belittle. While it is nobody's contention that the danger of a terrorist finger on the nuclear trigger is imminent, it is undeniable that the possibility will persist so long as nuclear weapons exist. And that is, or should be, enough to induce caution. Given the unmanageable consequences if any such threat were to ever materialise, is it not prudent to think in

terms of a pro-active course of action aimed at eliminating the very source of the problem instead of being left with no choice but to resort to desperate (and yet inadequate) fire-fighting measures after the event ?

One way or another, only a little reflection is needed to arrive at the conclusion that the continued existence of nuclear weapons poses such severe, unmanageable, risks that they cannot be – must not be – accepted, or reconciled to, as an immutable reality. They are, of course, a *fait accompli* as a historical legacy but a reality that must be regarded as a first rate liability that needs to be got rid of at the earliest opportunity, not an asset to be treasured or preserved in perpetuity – whether as perceived guarantors of security or as chips in geo-political game-playing.

It is not for nothing that a galaxy of statesmen, public figures, activists and academics world-wide have devoted a good part of their energies over the years to seeking a 'Nuclear Weapon Free World' (NFWF). At least since the First Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UN GA) on Disarmament in 1978, when nuclear disarmament was accepted by all nations as a desideratum, the goal of a NFWF has been articulated very clearly at various global forums repeatedly. India itself has been in the forefront of such advocacy -- by itself nationally, and also along with like-minded nations (as in the Six Nation Initiative, the Non-aligned Movement and other groupings and, above all, through the Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-violent World put forward by late Shri Rajiv Gandhi at the Third Special Session of the UN GA on Disarmament in 1988) -- but its pleas were paid little attention (until recently, after Pokhran II).

Why then the contrarian line of thinking in the defence establishments of the Nuclear Weapon States (NWSs) that has doggedly kept the NFWF proposition at bay? The main objection of those against it, on the plane of desirability (i.e. to the very idea conceptually), is based, as we're told, on the notion of "deterrence" – that nuclear weapons are useful because they "deter" the adversary (presumed naturally to be 'no-holds-barred' aggressive in intent) from attacking the vital interests of a State in possession of nuclear weapons (because of the instinct for self-preservation – i.e. the calculation that the adversary would desist from any hostile actions against such a state, knowing that nuclear retaliation by that state would result in its own devastation). In their absence, it is argued as a corollary, there would be 'instability' in the international order, since the adversary was likely to be tempted to go ahead with its aggressive designs "undeterred", resulting in an unpredictable, and possibly more damaging, chain of events. The same applied in reverse (to the other side – the adversary's adversary), it is averred further, so this situation of 'Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)' keeps each in check.

In so maintaining, the proponents of this point of view have the record of the post-World War II era in mind, chiefly the nuclear stand-off between the USA and the former Soviet Union (FSU) which is believed to have prevented both sides from going for an all out, all consuming, attack against the other. That such an apocalyptic scenario did not materialise, despite the public prediction (and professed intent) of one side to 'bury' the other (and the similar, if unarticulated, desire of the other to demolish the totalitarian State apparatus of their adversary), is presented as evidence of the 'stabilising' effect of nuclear weapons on international relations – specifically, on the security strategies of the FSU and the USA. These two leading adversaries of the Cold War period are said to have been deterred from attempting to overwhelm the antagonistic political system of the other – as their (self-professed) ideologies were wont to impel them to, it is argued –

by the very destructive power of nuclear weapons : i.e the sheer capacity of these weapons to cause “unacceptable damage” induced the possessing States to exercise restraint in their political conduct towards each other by making them rule out war as an instrument of State policy. This is the positive role nuclear weapons are believed to play – of making war a non-option, and thereby ensuring 'stability' in the international system, in short.

While there may have been some merit in this argument in the early stages of the Cold War, when the two ideological camps were yet to arrive at a *modus vivendi* for dealing with each other (and when each was truly out to subvert, and overthrow, the other's polity and system of governance), it would be stretching things a bit too far, in my opinion, if a happenstance and totally unintended (and bizarrely benign) by-product of the nuclear weapons conundrum under a specific historical circumstance were to be elevated to the level of a principle, or essential feature, of the international security system.

The problem with the deterrence construct is not so much its logic (which too has been faulted – the central contradiction of war avoidance being dependent upon war preparation), as its credibility in the real world fraught with uncertainties and not always, or even often, amenable to game theory modeling. It may not be possible to get into a discussion of those aspects here; suffice it to note that, the question of validity apart, the notion of deterrence – defensive in orientation as it might seem to be – is not free of risks, and grave ones at that. In fact, it is full of them and this aspect alone should be enough to warrant skepticism about this most sophisticated, but self-serving, exercise in sophistry that abounds in international relations literature.

In particular, there can be no guarantee that the mad game of MAD that was played out by the USA & the FSU (and later, Russia) in a bipolar situation would apply, equally assuredly, in other bi-polar (or multi-polar) settings or continue to be the only calculus in town with other players around. Not, in any case, when non-State actors active in fomenting terrorist violence in our region, and elsewhere in the world (to the point of instigating their indoctrinaires to commit suicidal acts of mass destruction) are factored into the reckoning – for they are not exactly known for their reasonableness or readiness for rational dialogue. How, one may ask, would the capacity to inflict “assured damage” deter a terrorist group (operating surreptitiously, sans the attributes – of territory, legitimacy etc. – of a member of the community of nation-States) from going about its business of causing wanton killings and destruction in order to register its rejectionist presence? Quite obviously, it wouldn't – and couldn't. This realisation, which should have been obvious long ago (and is, fortunately, widely prevalent now), puts paid to whatever little validity the deterrence argument might have enjoyed heretofore.

Another concern of those opposed to the NFWF idea stems from the impossibility of guaranteeing against some country cheating, in the event nuclear weapons were to be done away with, and the attendant fear of the asymmetric advantage that any such 'rogue State' would acquire over others in a NFWF, should it ever come to be. Nuclear weapons cannot be 'disinvented', it has been argued, so that the danger is not only that of concealment (of existing stocks) but also of clandestine manufacture afresh by a potential violator of the envisioned regime prohibiting nuclear weapons.

There is some merit in this argument – in theory, there can naturally be no guarantee, or assurance, in this regard. It will obviously not be possible for the international community to monitor, much less control, the hidden (mal)intentions of any 'rogue nation', if it does indeed harbor secret ambitions of breaking out of an agreed (nuclear weapons) prohibitory regime. But the potential violator would be doing so at the cost of being ostracised by the international community, for once the possession and manufacture of nuclear weapons, and even development or R&D of any kind, are prohibited by international agreement, and their use forbidden, any violator would automatically become an outlaw – a category that no member of the community of nations ever wants to be in (as is evident from the lengths to which States go to defend their actions as being within the bounds of law, whenever they have differences or conflicts with others). So is it in case of other kinds of weapons of mass destruction (chemical or biological) – or any other weapon for that matter (land mines, for example) -- that have been banned under international agreement and in respect of which prohibitory regimes are in place, and functional. Why is it that this problem, of fear of cheating, has not arisen in case of any of these weapons ? This is not a risk that is unique or peculiar to prohibition of nuclear weapons; it is inherent in all treaty based regulatory regimes that are the hall mark of civilised intercourse between nations (and, therefore, not uncommon in international law). So the concern, though valid, is difficult to understand as an argument against the proposition for a NFWF. It would appear to be more a ruse, an excuse for (unstated) unwillingness to accept the NFWF idea for different reasons, than a genuine concern.

Having dealt with the 'theoretical' arguments (against the very idea of abolition of nuclear weapons) – the ones that are most frequently advanced in expert discussions and discourse – let us turn to the 'practical' difficulties that are generally believed to bedevil the NFWF proposition. Most observers of the international scene would readily confess to a sense of unease and severe skepticism about the chances of a world without nuclear weapons ever seeing the light of day. This would be mainly because no one sees the NWSs embracing the idea easily, entailing – as it would – signing away of (what they believe to be) the source of their half a century (plus) old dominance and hegemony. The declared defence doctrines and strategies of these countries place heavy reliance upon nuclear weapons, making it difficult for strategic analysts and observers of the global security scene to imagine that the NWSs would be ready to buy into the NFWF notion.

This is not an entirely incorrect assessment. Or at least was not, until recently -- until April last, to be more precise, when US President Obama made a rather unexpected declaration in his public speech at Prague during his visit to Europe. Until then, it would not have been unreasonable for any observer to question the NFWF idea on grounds of political feasibility because the US, the country with the largest number of, and most modern, nuclear weapons was not ready to countenance the idea, or even to contemplate committing to ever move in that direction. And so, obviously, no matter what the rest of the world thought or said or did, the question of abolition of nuclear weapons could not have been posed, seriously, in any international dialogue worth the name so far.

But in his Prague speech, President Obama, making a remarkable departure from the past, affirmed “America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” (and that “the US will take concrete steps toward a world without nuclear weapons” and “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy”). This is as clear a statement of policy intent as there could be. It represents a conceptual breakthrough in US thinking, whose

significance cannot be overstated – the implied acknowledgement that US security would be enhanced, not diminished, in a NFWF. US rejectionism was the main reason for the NFWF proposition never having figured on the active international agenda so far; with this clearing of the cobwebs, as it were, by the President of the USA himself, a key road block stands removed and it should be possible for a different ball game altogether to now come into play.

This is not to say that 'nuclear nirvana' is round the corner or that a NFWF will come about easily or automatically, on its own, now. It would not be realistic to expect that. In international relations, nothing is ever simple or straightforward. Every country is sovereign unto itself and views developments and prospective proposals from its own perspective. Russia is said to be unenthusiastic about the NFWF idea because of a weak position vis-a-vis the NATO alliance in conventional (i.e. non-nuclear) arms. Nuclear weapons are generally believed to be a kind of leveler for Russia, to redress the asymmetry or disadvantage it suffers from in the balance of forces in conventional weapons. The UK and France, who have both long lost their rationale for holding nuclear weapons, such as there ever was during the Cold war era, are also loathe to admit, or be confronted with, the prospect of elimination of these weapons. The reaction of the Chinese, who have long taken cover behind the much larger numbers of these weapons in the arsenals of the two 'super-powers' – pleading that these two countries should reduce theirs drastically first, while being reticent about giving up their own – too cannot be taken for granted.

This is the picture that emerges from the UN Security Council's (UN SC) special session (held in September last at the level of Heads of Government). The theme of the session was "Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament" and it was held under the (monthly rotating) US Presidency, with the US President himself in the Chair. This might therefore have been just the occasion for the UN SC to (collectively) endorse the Prague promise of a NFWF. But the opportunity was passed – Resolution 1887, adopted at this meeting unanimously, consists of as many as 29 operative paragraphs but not one of them is on nuclear disarmament, not to speak of the culminating point of that process, namely total abolition of nuclear weapons. The Resolution concentrates entirely on 'non-proliferation' measures of one kind or another. Except for Austria, no other participating country – the US included – asked for elimination of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth in categorical terms (i.e. going beyond rhetoric or a passing mention devoid of operational content).

This episode or event, more than any other in recent post-Cold War history, attests to the non-seriousness (and duplicity, in fact) of the NWSs.

Given this manifest lack of enthusiasm on the part of the NWSs, to put it no stronger than that, the question that naturally arises is why one should get so taken up by the NFWF idea as to go on to suggest it as kind of a manifesto for all right thinking persons everywhere, in the country and outside ? I would submit that the argument should really be made in reverse – it is precisely because of the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the NWSs, which is unsurprising, that others need to brace themselves up and enter the fray. This is an issue that concerns everyone and is therefore not something that can be left to some select group of nations or individuals only to deal with as they deem fit. The absence of energetic endorsement of the US President's lead by others (and of action for translating it into a concrete multilaterally agreed goal of a 'global zero', i.e. as a legally

binding obligation undertaken by all nations), disappointing though it is, should not be reason for being disheartened or turning cynical and passive.

These (Nuclear Weapon) States may have their viewpoint or preferences in relation to nuclear weapons – and those would naturally have to be taken into account in any consideration of the issue – but that does not mean that they can presume some kind of a divine right to pronounce upon the NWFV proposition negatively. This is an idea whose time may have come and they would know that the non-NWSs signatory to the NPT (and international public opinion in general) will not be ready to grant them a ‘veto’ in this regard, certainly not now after President Obama's Prague promise.

A favourable circumstance in this context is that the (five yearly) NPT Review Conference is due to meet in coming May. As in previous Review Conferences, the basic bargain of the NPT – of the NWSs being required to strive (actually “negotiate in good faith”) for doing away with their nuclear weapons in return for the non-NWSs having foresworn them – is bound to come up for review. This is likely to be contentious, even acrimonious, as in previous Review Conferences because of the failure of the NWSs to live up to their part of the bargain in all these years since the NPT was concluded. The NWSs will be the ones to be on the defensive there; they will no longer be able to sit back and keep saying no.

And as to the glaring contradiction in the US approach – of itself not following up on President Obama's proclamation at Prague in the UN SC –, the most charitable interpretation would be that it was on account of ‘the best not being allowed to become the enemy of the good’. The US perhaps felt that there are more immediate dangers – of nuclear materials (and weapons) falling into the hands of terrorists, and of a possible proliferation of the number of nuclear weapons States – that needed to be tackled on priority, and therefore did not consider it opportune to await a consensus on the larger, and longer term, goal of a NWFV. Of course, it could also have been due to insincerity or doublespeak on its part – talk of nuclear disarmament, and commitment to a world without nuclear weapons, but when it comes to the ‘walk’, limit yourself to the ‘non-proliferation’ path.

It is noteworthy, in this connection, that Resolution 1887 was adopted by the UN SC immediately, at the outset of the September Summit meeting, on the basis of prior informal consultations. Not, as may have been expected, after an open debate in the Council. This means that it was (pre)cooked at the official level and presented to President Obama to steer. What it shows therefore is the hold of older, moribund, mindsets in the diplomatic establishments (of the USA and of the members of the UN SC) that would have undertaken the spadework for that meeting, not the US President's personal sincerity or the lack of it. Mindsets that have convinced themselves that ‘non-proliferation’ is ‘doable’, and therefore deserving of priority attention, but not nuclear disarmament, which they aver (or presume) can only evoke grandiose visions of an ideal world but never be agreed upon for want of practicability.

As with individuals, the force of habit tends to drag bureaucracies back to the beaten track even after dawning of a new realisation (through the lead of a visionary Head of Government with a transformational approach, in this case). It will have to be tackled through the force of reason, patiently and persuasively – there is no other go. This is the task to which the attention and

energies of all right thinking persons need to be devoted now – to try to mindfully effect a paradigmatic shift in the international discourse on global security issues, away from the narrowness of the 'arms control' framework, taking advantage of the opening created by President Obama's courageous call at Prague. The die-hard 'nuclear weapon wallahs' need to be reminded that at their historic meeting at Reykjavik in 1986, Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev had almost agreed to do away with all nuclear weapons altogether, after declaring that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”. But for the 'Star Wars' initiative (that President Reagan was not ready to give up) coming in the way, they might have gone further -- to that last step and declare also that it (a nuclear war) 'would not be fought', consequent to their having agreed to do away with their arsenals.

India is well placed to do that kind of heavy lifting because it is one of the few countries that has the standing and capacity to take an independent and detached view of developments and, where necessary, call a spade a spade. It has done so from time to time, and not always unsuccessfully. Moreover, it has a unique, and exemplary, record in respect of utilisation of nuclear technology, which it may be useful to recall briefly at this stage.

Alone amongst the states that possess nuclear weapons, India began its nuclear programme with civilian nuclear technology. In all other cases, the civilian nuclear programmes came later as an offshoot of military prowess, of mastery of nuclear weapons. This is, in fact, what gave nuclear technology a bad name and such a horrifying image that it continues to be looked upon with suspicion in many parts of the world in a way no other technology is – as e.g. Austria and Ireland (both countries where I had the privilege of representing our country and locking horns with many an interlocutor in connection with the 'India specific Safeguards Agreement' with the IAEA, and the exemption granted by the Nuclear Suppliers Group to India, in September 2008), to mention just two out of a number of European countries.

But what of Pokhran and the non-civilian, military, dimensions of the Indian nuclear programme, it would be asked and rightly so ? Well, the answer is that that was not a matter of choice; it was a decision forced on the nation by circumstances. For India's nuclear weapons were born, it must not be forgotten, out of India's failure -- and the failure of the international community as a whole – to persuade the NPT Nuclear Weapon States (NWSs) to get rid of theirs. For long years, India strove hard (along with others) to mobilize international opinion to that end, while exercising extreme restraint by not going in for nuclear weapons itself despite a hostile strategic security environment. (For meeting its national security needs, India rested content with keeping the nuclear 'option' open – staying out of the NPT and keeping abreast of all aspects of nuclear technology.) These efforts for abolition of nuclear weapons did not make any headway (beyond some limited 'arms control' measures between the former Soviet Union and the USA).

In 1995, the NPT was extended in perpetuity without any commitment by the NWSs to do away with nuclear weapons ever, resulting in a severe regression in India's strategic security environment. For this meant that the hierarchy of nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots' created by this infamous regime – a discriminatory order that had left a country like India without a place under its Sun – could last indefinitely.

Even so, India held back on exercise of the nuclear option. It was the pushing through of the so-called Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996, without that Treaty being embedded in a framework of nuclear disarmament (in the sense of obliging the NWSs to follow up on the ban on testing with concrete nuclear disarmament measures leading to abolition of all nuclear weapons) that proved to be the last straw for India and led to its reconsidering its long standing policy of utilising nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only. It decided to reject the 'CTBT' and, later in 1998, to cross the Rubicon and test nuclear weapons. For such a 'CTBT' would have emasculated India's nuclear option -- of maintaining 'recessed' readiness and capability, its preferred answer to its strategic security predicament (of being confronted with nuclear weapons in its neighbourhood) -- without any guarantee of an eventual world without nuclear weapons.

It was not a decision that came easy and it was not the best solution, in India's own reckoning, to its strategic security dilemma. The Indian strategic establishment well understood that exercise of the option in favour of nuclear weapons was only a 'second best', or sub-optimal, answer, yet was left with no choice but to go in for it. If nuclear weapons (and the distinction between nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots') were there to stay, India could not afford to remain 'nuclear naked' or be consigned to the category of the 'have-nots' permanently; severe costs though there undoubtedly were attached to this 'second best' solution of crossing the Rubicon.

It is necessary to recall this perspective here in order to be able to draw the right conclusions about the role and utility of the nuclear arsenal in the nation's possession in the changing, and changed, external scenario in our neighbourhood and in the global geo-political landscape in the years since Pokhran '98. That watershed decision to go nuclear became necessary for reasons that lay outside the nation's control, as explained above. But without prejudice to the soundness of that decision, I would submit to our security and political establishment, most respectfully, that nuclear weapons are in no way essential for our security -- and certainly not for all time to come and under all circumstances, not at all. It might appear to be so -- given the fact that our adversaries are not likely to countenance any suggestion to relinquish theirs, the need for India to retain its own arsenal would appear to be self-evident -- but, in fact, it is quite the contrary. Today, nuclear weapons don't add to, but take away from, our security for the risks they bring in their wake (even at 'minimal' levels of stockpiling) are much too high to make their continued retention indefinitely worthwhile. And the risks, and consequences, in the event of a breakdown of "deterrence", no matter what the trigger for that breakdown -- deliberate or accidental --, would be unmanageable.

The real utility of nuclear weapons for India is political -- as a lever, and leveler, of sorts in a world order not of its making --, not military. But it has to be acknowledged that the calculus of these 'weapons' is such that the political advantage (of their serving as a lever or a leveler) accrues only if they are maintained in fighting fit, full military, condition. Ironically, yes. That, in turn, means that the benefits cannot be had without incurring the risks; also that some degree of an arms race is built into the (il)logic of nuclear weapons, subjective disinclination for indulging in an arms race notwithstanding.

Hence the overall negative assessment of (continued retention of) nuclear weapons in the 'cost-benefit-risk' analysis underlying this presentation.

That – the political vs. the military function of nuclear weapons -- is a distinction worth bearing in mind for it impinges on a basic point that deserves greater attention, to my mind, than has been accorded to it in the country – namely, what is the continued relevance and role of the nuclear arsenal in the nation's possession in times to come. There has not been any debate in the country in this regard*. It is as if the nation had come to the conclusion that there was nothing more to be examined or discussed after the 1998 decision of the nation to go in for nuclear weapons had become a *fait accompli*. True, the 'no-first use' and minimal deterrent doctrines -- both eminently sensible decisions which have served the nation well -- were adopted soon enough in follow up to Pokhran II but the question of the adequacy of these basic policy postures (for addressing the nuclear conundrum in its totality) has not figured in the public discourse at all. In particular, the risk aspect – the risks that remain (and to which the nation is likely to remain exposed indefinitely unless it galvanizes itself and others to think out of the box for finding a way of getting rid of nuclear weapons altogether), these two extremely far-reaching and well thought out policy approaches notwithstanding.

From the premise(s) outlined above in the preceding paragraphs, which it is hoped would be acceptable to all constituencies in the country, flows the rationale of the present submission – namely, that the political leverage acquired by the nation as a result of its momentous decision of 1998 to invite itself into the 'nuclear club' can, and should, be exercised (i.e. traded off) for the purpose of securing a world free of nuclear weapons, which in the final analysis is India's supreme interest (and which, at long last, no longer remains consigned to the realm of the unthinkable). How is this to be done, what India can do – by itself or along with others – and so on, these will be the questions addressed now in conclusion.

First, India could declare its readiness to reconsider the non-civilian part of its nuclear programme, provided a legally binding commitment for time-bound elimination of all nuclear weapons of all countries could be agreed upon internationally. This can give a powerful impetus to the NFWW proposition – it would be the first time that a nuclear weapons power would have offered to give up its nuclear weapons, for no other NWS has done so as yet. (The only other proposal of its kind is again an Indian one – the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-violent World that was tabled at the UNGA at its Third Special Session on Disarmament in 1988, wherein India had expressed readiness to forgo the nuclear 'weaponisation' option, which was all that it had at that time, as part of a time-bound programme for elimination of all nuclear weapons.) China has for form's sake implied similar outcomes in its policy posture occasionally but not really come to the point of making such a commitment categorically. And the

* The initial, charged, controversies in the immediate aftermath of Pokhran II are in a different category, as they centred on the wisdom and propriety, or otherwise, of exercise of the option in the first place (and took place in a state of shock, more or less, in a polity unreconciled to and unfamiliar with the new reality of Indian nuclear weapons that had just come into being) – and did not at all address the longer term scenario, in a cool headed manner.

others are nowhere there, except for the refreshing departure in President Obama's declaration in Prague.

Hopefully, such an offer might trigger a demand for other Nuclear Weapon States to follow suit. The NAM, which has been consistent in not losing sight of the centrality of nuclear weapons in its consideration of international security issues, can be expected to come out in support of such a proposal by India as it would further a long standing NAM objective – of total elimination of nuclear weapons – and could therefore be engaged by India for exploring inclination for joint pursuit of the goal of a NFWF. The late Smt. Indira Gandhi had described NAM as “history’s biggest peace movement” at the New Delhi NAM Summit in 1983 and so it remains today – India would do well to place its nuclear prowess at the disposal of NAM, notionally, for utilizing in furtherance of the larger goal of a NFWF. The NAM-India interaction on this question, which it has to be acknowledged has waned in recent years after Pokhran ’98 in part because of a mistaken understanding on the part of some (including, it has to be said with regret, within the country too) that India had crossed over to the ‘other side’, needs to be revitalized for realising their common and long cherished goal of ridding the Earth of the nuclear menace.

A group of countries (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden), which has come to be known as the “New Agenda Coalition”, has been campaigning against nuclear weapons. Although their initiative brings in the NPT – a feature that obliges India to withhold support to their annual Resolution in the UNGA –, that need not come in the way of India seeking their support for its initiative. This is because the suggested proposal, were it to be made by India, has the potential of bypassing the sticking point (over the discriminatory nature of) the NPT and attracting their support since it goes straight to the core of the matter – abolition of nuclear weapons – , which the New Agenda Coalition is itself striving for (albeit by a different route).

With NAM and some such 'core' group of countries leading the way, the UN GA – which is the ultimate repository of international opinion – could be approached for (re)endorsing the goal of a 'global zero' (of nuclear weapons) in order to seal agreement at the conceptual level. Once that is achieved, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (which is the designated UN body for negotiating disarmament agreements and has so far not been able to even bring nuclear disarmament on its agenda primarily because of US led opposition hitherto) could hopefully be tasked (by the UN GA) to finally commence negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention outlawing the use of nuclear weapons and prohibiting their manufacture and development (the way a Chemical Weapons Convention providing for elimination of chemical weapons globally in a specified time frame, with mechanisms to verify compliance to the satisfaction of all signatories, was concluded and brought into force).

In addition to these measures aimed at mobilising support and galvanising public opinion internationally, there is one more step that India could take to further the NFWF ideal – a more direct and weighty one but also a more difficult and bold one as it would, in all likelihood, involve going it alone. And I shall conclude with that suggestion for heeding the higher call of “ekla chalo re”, if it could be put that way in Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's evocative lines.

This concerns the 'CTBT', which India was constrained to reject in 1996 during the negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva because it had no provisions for linking its prohibition of nuclear testing to the goal of elimination of nuclear weapons, or even to nuclear disarmament in general terms. The text of this 'treaty' has a provision that it cannot enter into force until all 44 countries listed in its Annex II, which includes India, accede to it. (India was included in this list, it would be recalled, without its consent and despite its reservations on the text under negotiation having been placed on record – at the instance of some powers cleverly seeking to take cover behind Indian objections.) This aspect therefore now provides India with leverage that could be used to good effect.

Thus India could declare (again, now) that it would not be in a position to sign the 'CTBT' unless prior agreement was reached on a legally binding commitment for abolition of all nuclear weapons within a specified time frame and incorporated in the 'CTBT' text, through an amendment for addition of an opening operative paragraph to that effect. Specific language in this respect could be drafted without difficulty, if the idea would be acceptable in principle.

India would, in other words, be serving notice that either there is (complete and categorical) commitment to move towards abolition of all nuclear weapons of all countries in a non-discriminatory manner – and that would be the preferred Indian alternative, it should be spelt out loud and clear – or a comprehensive nuclear test ban would have to await a more propitious time, when conditions were conducive for agreement on a nuclear weapon free world alongside. That would be a way of instilling a sense of purpose and urgency into the nuclear disarmament debate, which has repeatedly been waylaid, as it were, by *ad hoc* or partial measures aimed at serving only limited objectives – of non-proliferation (and that too selectively) – with no more than lip service to nuclear disarmament; the September 2009 UN SC Summit session being the latest example of such doubletalk.

This is obviously not a decision that can be taken lightly: viz. of the nation deciding to leverage on the 'CTBT' in order to secure a 'nuclear weapon free world'. But it should be possible to do, for the nation has a cast-iron case, with both the force of argument and moral force on its side – the seemingly *real politik* lever being suggested here as a diplomatic *Brahmastra* would only be the icing on that moral cake. In essence, the approach would be that of '*satyagraha*' – with India seeking to (insistently) persuade the rest of the world (i.e. resorting to '*agraha*') of the truth ('*satya*') of its position (that all nuclear weapons of all countries were equally abominable and therefore needed to go all together, and not just those potentially in the hands of nations that are yet to test them, leaving those in the hands of the 'early testers', i.e. NWSs, undisturbed in their undeserved privilege). In true Gandhian spirit, India would be seeking from others no more (but also no less) than what it is prepared to do itself.

Though admittedly somewhat unconventional an approach, it would be an exercise well worth the effort, it is submitted, given the historic gain (of ridding itself, and the world, of nuclear weapons, once and for all and, with that, of the dangers of an accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons, and risks of escalation of any conflict to a level above the nuclear threshold as well) at stake.

Such a stupendous task will naturally require a domestic, all party, consensus as a pre-requisite – it would obviously be inconceivable for any Government to pursue any such ambitious

initiative without broad based support across the political spectrum. And appropriate preparation within, at the official level through an inter-agency process (given the large number of 'constituencies' -- strategic security related Departments and organizations -- involved) based on a thrashing out of the possible security ramifications of the above mentioned suggestions, as perceived from the standpoint of different actors in the national security establishment. (There really are no adverse consequences for national security but this would need to be appreciated by, and possibly explained to, all concerned in order to pre-empt a presumptive war cry against 'unilateral' disbanding of the Indian nuclear weapons capability and 'status'.)

A White Paper may therefore need to be prepared for this purpose, to authoritatively establish the proposition that the optimal role for the nuclear weapons in the nation's possession would be to have them serve as trading 'chips', to be exchanged for global agreement on abolition of nuclear weapons, i.e. to put them to politico-diplomatic use. The National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), an apex body which has mixed representation from both Governmental and non-governmental experts, could be entrusted with the task of examining the pros and cons and making an overall recommendation on that basis.

The draft White Paper prepared by the NSAB could then be discussed within the official strategic security establishment, and finalised for closed door, all Party, discussions in the relevant specialized bodies -- Standing Committees of Defence and External Affairs (which could be serviced by strategic experts from all fields -- military, technology, diplomacy etc) or an *ad hoc* body specially formed for the purpose -- of Parliament to enable Hon'ble Parliamentarians to be fully assured of safeguarding of the nation's best interests. Red lines could be set by them, in respect of the NPT, 'CTBT' etc, therein for endorsement by open cross-party deliberations in the (main) Parliament Houses themselves. Such guidelines -- spelling out clear bottom lines -- and firm political backing would enable the nation's diplomatic machine to negotiate the by no means easy (external) terrain effectively.

All this might appear, at first glance, to be a no go, practically. Something that might invite skepticism -- after all, it might be argued, is it not exactly the kind of thing that India was doing for long years prior to Pokhran II, with scant success ?

But it is really not so. There is a huge difference in the situation that prevailed pre-Pokhran and now, which is not always appreciated while considering contemporary India's capacity to influence the global discourse on nuclear disarmament. That difference lies in the fact that when India was in an advocacy mode in the pre-Pokhran days, it had very little to bring to the negotiating table (while making tall demands on others -- on the NWSs). That is no longer the case. In seeking abolition of nuclear weapons now, India would be doing so as a 'State with Nuclear Weapons' (SNW) ready to close down its own shop. That would be no mean gain (for the global 'non-proliferation regime' and its protagonists world-wide), and therefore cannot but weigh heavily with all concerned, including India's detractors from within the non-proliferation fundamentalists' fold, while considering and responding to renewed Indian activism for nuclear disarmament on the lines suggested here.

Plus there would be the very welcome consequence -- for the whole world -- of the Pakistani arsenal being roped in as well, in the process; something that is a source of anxiety for

all nations but for which none has an answer. That would be a huge, an even bigger, gain (for all nations, China included -- though it may not be ready to acknowledge that in public), which cannot but influence world reaction to the Indian initiative(s).

And as to the doubts about practicality of this approach, it is at heart a question of conceptual clarity on the use(s) to which the nation wishes to put its nuclear arsenal (and military prowess and politico-diplomatic standing, as a SNW) in the ultimate analysis -- mere military and diplomatic profiling or to transact a hard strategic bargain for having them outlawed and for actualizing the NFWF vision -- the larger, long term, strategic security interest of the nation by any rational argument. The answer, it is recommended, must be the latter -- i.e. trading them off for securing a world without nuclear weapons. (Of course, in the interregnum until that prospect materialises, the arsenal would have to be 'nurtured', i.e. developed, as per military requirements without let or hindrance).

There is no contradiction in this perspective whatsoever, it needs to be clarified -- a world without nuclear weapons is, without doubt, the nation's preferred outcome (for the future naturally, since it hasn't happened as yet), and the latter posture (of maintaining preparedness meanwhile) an inescapable duty (of the Government of the day) in the present demanded by current ground level realities, pending 'entelechy' of that grand vision of a world waiting to be born.

The various aspects of the nuclear weapons conundrum therefore deserve to be discussed in depth dispassionately, including in Parliament, and in good time -- well in advance of the 'CTBT' coming up on the anvil internationally, when the die might already be cast, and not just in the heat of the moment, when interested parties find it easier to queer the pitch for rational decision-making.

I believe such a courageous course of action -- India's open offer to trade off its military nuclear prowess in return for (hastening of) a 'nuclear weapon free world' -- would be in accordance with Dr. Ramanna's approach of working tirelessly to enhance the nation's nuclear standing and capabilities, for pioneering peaceful uses of nuclear energy in particular. India would, in effect, have turned its nuclear arsenal into a 'global public good' -- a creative exercise in high diplomacy harmoniously blending national priorities with global concerns that would be a contribution unmatched in recent history.

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He was a member of the Indian delegation to the Third Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament in 1988 that presented the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-violent World and to the UN Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development in 1987.

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