

India & the Nuclear Question

Day 48 of your revision. The whole nuclear file — evolution, doctrine, NFU, deterrence, treaties and the global order — compressed for fast recall. **Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.**

PYQs, 2015–2025: 2015 · 2016 · 10m · 2017 · 15m · 2019 · 15m · 2020 · 15m · 2021 · 15m · 2022 · 15m · 2023 · 20m · 2024 · 15m.

PART A How India Became a Nuclear State

I Introduction — security, ambiguity and the disarmament ideal

Sovereignty and territorial integrity are the first goods a state secures; security ultimately rests on preponderant power backed by military capability. Nuclear weapons — the ultimate weapons of mass destruction — are the most sought-after instruments in a changing security environment.

- **Scott D. Sagan** → states seek nuclear weapons when they face a significant military threat that cannot be met by other means; absent such a threat, they willingly remain non-nuclear.
- **Harsh V. Pant** → since independence India has tried to harmonise national security with a commitment to universal nuclear disarmament, pursuing a **nuclear-weapon-free world (NFWF)** through a multilaterally negotiated, verifiable treaty. China's first nuclear test (1964) transformed India's strategic environment and pushed India toward the 1974 "peaceful nuclear explosion."
- India's civilian programme was laid down in 1948 to secure the status, respect and economic benefits of a nuclear power, keeping open the option of military use.

Strategic ambiguity

India resisted any cap on its programme, yet was reluctant to emerge as a full-fledged NWS because of the diplomatic and economic costs. Ambiguity let India reconcile security imperatives with disarmament objectives — a moral aversion to nuclear weapons alongside a real security hedge.

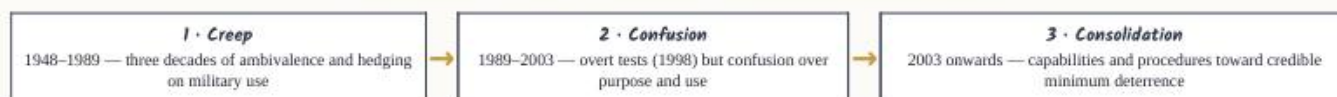
"Viewed logically and strategically, nuclear weapons are unusable weapons. Yet, major political or military bungling by one or both adversaries can precipitate their unwitting use." — **Verghese Koithara**

2 Evolution of India as a Nuclear Weapons State

"India's nuclear policy has evolved from the Nehruvian premise of the exclusive peaceful development of nuclear energy to the present condition of India claiming the status of a nuclear weapon state." — **Shreya Mitra**

Vipin Narang calls India's path "a puzzling trajectory, unique amongst nuclear weapons states," moving through three phases.

Three phases — Creep → Confusion → Consolidation (Vipin Narang)



Reading the programme through levels of analysis

Using **Kenneth Waltz's** levels of analysis, **Vipin Narang** argues structural constraints set the broad parameters and made nuclearisation likely, but **domestic organisations and individuals drove the timing** of each punctuation.

- **Creep** → progress came through the individual initiative of **Indira Gandhi** and **Rajiv Gandhi**; the programme moved only on prime-ministerial authorisation. Indira's PNE possibly driven by political compulsion to rally votes — no immediate security trigger a decade after China's test. Rajiv shifted to weaponisation after late-1980s crises and reports of Pakistan nearing capability.
- **Confusion** → unstable coalitional politics neutralised prime-ministerial interest; the Air Force could not reliably deliver even rudimentary weapons; a test was aborted in 1995 under **Narasimha Rao**. **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** tested in 1998 despite few immediate pressures — India "**tested first and asked questions later.**"
- **Consolidation** → external shocks (the **Kargil War**) pushed India to build a strong assured-retaliation capability; **DRDO** spearheaded operationalisation.

Vipin Narang → the dominance of domestic and individual factors produced a policy that can look "**schizophrenic**" to outsiders. In the confusion phase India was "**kind of pregnant with nuclear weapons**" — every state knew India had rudimentary weapons, but India refused to admit it. The best remedy is strong civilian oversight and coordination, since India faces no existential threat from Pakistan or China.

2.1 Phase I — Creep (1948–1989)

- **Jawaharlal Nehru** laid the civilian groundwork (AEC 1948, DAE 1954) while calling for global universal disarmament — pragmatic and ambiguous on military use; **Homi Bhabha** pushed for weapons on security and prestige grounds.
- **Chris Ogden** → AEC and DAE lacked institutional checks and were minimally influenced by the military — a technology focus, under direct prime-ministerial control.

- Security shocks → the 1962 war and China's 1964 test. **Lal Bahadur Shastri** showed little interest — a food-short India could not afford a weapons programme. India sought a **nuclear security guarantee** from the US and USSR; both refused.
- India refused the NPT over its inequities — **Jaswant Singh** later called these “nuclear apartheid.”
- **Homi Sethna** (AEC head, 1971) lobbied **Indira Gandhi** for years to approve a PNE. The **1974 PNE** made India a **latent nuclear weapons power** — capable but restrained; the device was too big and unstable, delivery limited. **G. Perkovich** → retaliation possible only with severe delay, since India kept no assembled weapons.
- **Vipin Narang** → after 1974 the programme went almost dormant for a decade (Emergency, the anti-nuclear **Morarji Desai** interregnum, Punjab, Indira's assassination). **Rajiv Gandhi** revived it in response to Pakistan's advancing weapons; accelerated the **IGMDP** (Prithvi and Agni flight tests from 1988).

Phase II — Confusion (1989–2003)

- After Rajiv's order, more than a decade of **Narang's** “a little bit pregnant with nuclear weapons” syndrome — unanswered questions on what to do with the weapons, how many, how to deliver, against whom, under what conditions.
- Coalitional politics and external pressures (indefinite NPT extension, CTBT momentum) added complexity; scientists urged tests, the military had minimal involvement. The “will she or won't she test?” phase: **Narasimha Rao** came close in 1995; **Vajpayee** ordered tests in his 13-day government but pulled back.
- **1998** → a stable BJP government tested at Pokhran — justified by China, the China–Pakistan nexus, and the hypocrisy of NPT/CTBT powers. India was the first new state to test overtly in 34 years, but without clear use plans.
- The **Draft Nuclear Doctrine (1999)** was simultaneously inconsistent and ambitious — credible minimum deterrence undefined, a full triad unexplained; government disavowed it as “a draft by national security elites.” **Kargil** exposed the limits of nuclear deterrence against sub-conventional threats.

Phase III — Consolidation (2003 onwards)

- The 2003 doctrine marks the shift from confusion to consolidation. **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** raised — the military brought into decision-making for the first time; a dedicated **National Command Authority (NCA)** answers to the PMO. Civilian stewardship endures.
- **Agni-5 and Agni-6** bring China within strategic reach; shorter-range accurate missiles for counterforce use against Pakistan; India has developed a **nuclear triad** (land, air, sea).
- **Vipin Narang** → the key challenge is reining in **DRDO's** ambitions to build beyond assured retaliation — a BMD layer and MIRVs for some Agni missiles, though no deployment decision has been taken.

UPSC 2021 · ISm Examine the evolution of India's role in the global nuclear order.

PART B Rationale, Doctrine & No First Use

3 Why India Went Nuclear

Reasons for acquiring nuclear weapons

- **Security vis-à-vis China** → China's capabilities and assertive behaviour created vulnerability after 1962 and 1964.
- **Discontent with the non-proliferation regime** → the NPT seen as biased, entrenching a haves/have-nots divide.
- **Pakistan's nuclear ambitions** → intelligence sharpened the regional rivalry.
- **Loss of the Soviet nuclear umbrella** → the USSR's collapse removed Cold War assurances.
- **US pressure to sign the CTBT** → resisted as an impediment to development and sovereignty.
- **Confidence from the New Economic Policy** → post-1991 liberalisation bred belief India could withstand sanctions.
- **Domestic factors and nationalist sentiment** → rightist ideology, prestige, the drive for recognition.

C. Raja Mohan → India's decision was a calculated, cautious and pragmatic choice, balancing security in a volatile neighbourhood with strategic autonomy.

Approaches to the arsenal

School	Champions	Prescription
Minimalist	K. Subrahmanyam, Ashley Tellis	A limited, modest arsenal sufficient to deter and maintain stability.
Middle Path	Gen. K. Sundarji	An adequate force structure balancing minimalism and expansion.
Maximalist	Bharat Karnad, Jayant Prasad	A larger, well-armed arsenal (incl. thermonuclear) for great-power status; counter China and Pakistan.
Flexible / open-ended	Satish Chandra	An arsenal keyed to threat perception, able to inflict “unacceptable damage” on both.

Criticism of India's programme

Regional arms race with Pakistan · undermining the NPT and wider order · proliferation concerns (Pakistan's aid from North Korea) · heightened West Asian anxieties · Kargil showed deterrence did not prevent conventional conflict · nuclear-terrorism risk · opportunity cost against socio-economic development.

4 India's Nuclear Doctrine

Rajesh Rajagopalan → the first doctrine (unofficial, 1999) was produced by the **National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)**, a group of non-governmental experts; the government disowned it. Its one notable addition was the explicit call for a **nuclear triad**. The **official doctrine (2003)** came as a brief press

statement (~349 words) and retained the core of the 1999 document.

1999 Draft Doctrine (NSAB)

No First Use of nuclear weapons.

An unspecified **minimum force**, credible and survivable; capability to withstand a first strike.

Strict civilian control.

A **triad** of aircraft, long-range ballistic missiles and SLBMs; reaffirmation of disarmament objectives.

2003 Official Doctrine — main changes

“**Massive**” **retaliation** introduced (the 1999 draft spoke only of “punitive” retaliation causing “unacceptable” damage).

Dilution of the **NFU** pledge and of the pledge not to attack non-nuclear states.

The original unconditional NFU gains a qualifier — India will consider nuclear use in response to a **major CBW attack** on India or Indian forces anywhere.

Rationale — having given up CBW, India has only nuclear weapons to deter CBW use; answered criticism that NFU was too weak; reflected frustration after **Operation Parakram** (2001–02).

UPSC 2016 · 10m Critically analyze India’s nuclear policy.

5 No First Use (NFU)

No First Use

A pledge to abstain from the first use of nuclear (or other WMD) weapons, reserving them for retaliation against a WMD attack. India’s doctrine promises NFU with one caveat — retaliation against CBW attacks.

NFU was first articulated by **China (1964)**. India articulated its NFU in **1998**, set it in the **1999 NSAB** draft, and retained it in **2003**. China and India are the only states officially committed to NFU (NATO has consistently rejected it); China’s commitment stays unqualified, India modified its pledge in 2003.

Rajesh Rajagopalan frames two camps — **Moderates** (deterrence optimists who support the current NFU) and **Expansionists** (who want NFU revised to be more aggressive).

View of the Moderates (for NFU)

- **K. Subrahmanyam** → deterrence is perception, not numbers; a pre-emptive strike cannot prevent retaliation — the argument against pre-emption.
- **Manpreet Sethi** → NFU “**obviates the need for the expensive nuclear weapons infrastructure associated with a first-use doctrine**”; by conceding the initiative it is a “**liberating**” approach.
- NFU removes hair-trigger alerts, allows a **de-mated** posture, and averts **Permissive Action Links**. **Rakesh Sood** → India is unlikely to have a first-strike capability to “decapitate” Pakistan or China.
- **Verghese Koithara** → NFU reduces arsenal size and complexity, eases command-and-control, and provides greater political control through centralised custody. **Pulkit Mohan** → NFU perpetuates India’s responsible-NWS image.

View of the Expansionists (against NFU)

- **Bharat Karnad** → abandon NFU; “**the NFU principle is unenforceable**” — “more a peacetime declaration that a country does not have to abide by during war”; India’s crisis-management system is “**manifestly incapable of handling**” a nuclear strike.
- **P. R. Chari** (an opponent of nuclear weapons) → NFU’s “**insufficiency**” frees Pakistan from fearing an Indian nuclear riposte to terrorism or limited war.
- **Rajiv Nayar** → the CBW caveat lost an advantage without gaining value. **Toby Dalton** → NFU restricts New Delhi’s options; **D. Suba Chandran** → Pakistan does not believe India’s pledge anyway.
- China’s modernisation has eroded the Himalayan buffer; against Pakistan, terrorism and tactical weapons blunt India’s conventional edge — massive retaliation against small nuclear use does not help.

Structural pressures on NFU

- NFU suits a power comfortable at the conventional level — but China’s modernisation has eroded the terrain buffer, and Pakistan blunts India’s edge through sub-conventional assets and tactical weapons. Pre-emptive **counterforce (CF)** strikes are proposed as a way out — **B. S. Nagal** openly advocates this; **Shivshankar Menon** is open to it.
- **Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang** (“India’s Counterforce Temptations”) → more accurate missiles, MIRVs, surveillance and missile defence make CF strikes against Pakistan more feasible, though India remains far from a reliable capability. **Kumar Sundaram** → canisterisation and readiness create the material grounds for first use and raise the risk of accidental war.

The recent debate & consolidated positions

- **2014** → the BJP manifesto promised to “revise and update” the doctrine, then denied any change. **Manohar Parrikar** → “**Why should I bind myself? I should say I am a responsible nuclear power and I will not use it irresponsibly.**” **Rajnath Singh** (Aug 2019) → India remains committed to NFU, but the future “depends on the circumstances.”
- **Against NFU**: **Bharat Karnad**, **P. R. Chari**, **Vipin Narang**, **Raja Menon**, **B. S. Nagal**. **For NFU**: **K. Subrahmanyam**, **Manpreet Sethi**, **Verghese Koithara**, **Rajesh Basrur**, **Shivshankar Menon**, **Rakesh Sood**, **Harsh V. Pant**, **Manoj Joshi**.
- The dominant view (affirmed by the MEA) favours retaining NFU, with consensus that the doctrine should be periodically reviewed and better communicated.

Reassessment after Pahalgam (2025)

The April 2025 **Pahalgam** terror attack reopened the NFU debate in an era of asymmetric warfare. **Rajnath Singh** criticised Pakistan’s nuclear threats and called for international supervision of its arsenal; **Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan** (ORF) and the **Belfer Center** read NFU as weakening, with MIRV-equipped Agni-V and SSBNs pointing to more flexible deterrence — in line with **C. Raja Mohan**’s advocacy of doctrinal ambiguity against Pakistan’s “full-spectrum deterrence.” India’s calibrated strikes under **Operation Sindoor** exemplify escalation control; **Walter Ladwig** (RUSI) supports precision strikes for stability, while **Hans Kristensen** (FAS) warns they could push Pakistan toward the **Nasr** missile — echoing **Shyam Saran**’s concern over fragile red lines. **John Mearsheimer** reads India’s moves as rational offensive realism; **Andrew Heywood** favours UN/FATF counter-terror frameworks over sole reliance on military deterrence.

UPSC 2019 · 15m **UPSC 2020 · 15m** Need to change / efficacy of India’s NFU policy given evolving challenges from its neighbours.

5.1 Operation Sindoor & the New Doctrine of Deterrence (2025)

After the **Pahalgam** attack (22 April 2025; 26 civilians killed, many singled out by faith), India launched **Operation Sindoor** on the night of 6–7 May — its most serious military crisis with Pakistan in decades, ending in a ceasefire on 10 May. India struck nine terrorist sites deep inside Pakistani Punjab (first strikes on the **Muridke** and **Bahawalpur** headquarters of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed), held the **Indus Waters Treaty** in abeyance, and announced a “new normal” against terrorism.

The crisis — essential facts

- **Firsts** → first Indian use of **BrahMos** and **SCALP-EG** cruise missiles against Pakistan; first India–Pakistan clash where both sides used drones to inflict damage; Pakistan first used **Fatah-I / Fatah-II** SRBMs; deepest strikes into Pakistani Punjab since 1971.
- **Escalation (7–10 May)** → Pakistan claimed downing Indian jets on 7 May (India later confirmed some losses); on 9–10 May India struck about eleven military sites, including **Nur Khan airbase** near Rawalpindi. No manned aircraft crossed the border — a stand-off exchange throughout. Pakistan launched **Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos** on 10 May.
- **Ceasefire** → reached 10 May through DGMO channels. The US role is disputed — Washington claimed mediation, India insists the pause was bilateral.
- **The doctrine (12 May)** → Modi set out three pillars: retaliation for any terror attack, on India’s terms; no tolerance of “nuclear blackmail”; no distinction between terrorists and the governments that sponsor them.

From restraint to cost-imposition

- **Arzan Tarapore** (War on the Rocks) → a change in India’s theory of victory — no longer expecting that threatening punishment will change Pakistani behaviour, India now treats Pakistani intent as fixed and seeks to degrade terrorist capacity through repeated, direct cost imposition (a “**mowing the grass**” / cumulative-deterrence logic).
- **Happymon Jacob** (India’s World) → a doctrinal innovation that collapses the distinction between subconventional and conventional aggression and, with little nuclear talk on either side, calls Pakistan’s nuclear bluff. His sharpest claim: Sindoor builds a **tripwire** — a terror attack means Pakistan has already begun a conventional conflict, shifting the burden of avoiding war to Islamabad.
- **Walter Ladwig III** (RUSI) → a lower bar for action — Pakistan’s failure to deny space to terrorist groups is now treated as reason enough to strike.

The commitment trap & the sceptical case

- **Tarapore** → the pledge to respond every time creates a **commitment trap** — India cedes the initiative to the terrorists and narrows its room to manoeuvre; a pure cost-imposition strategy cannot deliver peace and never ends. **Moeed Yusuf and Rizwan Zeb** (Carnegie) trace the same dynamic to Uri and Pulwama, each “new normal” raising the political price of inaction next time. (Yusuf is a former NSA of Pakistan; the paper reads the crises from Islamabad’s vantage.)
- **Sameer Lalwani, Shailender Arya and David Brostoff** (War on the Rocks) → question the coercive value of “non-contact warfare” — stand-off strikes signal resolve without imposing much real pain; the Pakistan Army treats militant proxies as an instrument of policy, so limited strikes are unlikely to change its conduct. They add the **China factor** — Pakistan’s use of Chinese systems hardened Indian assessments of a fused two-front threat. **Ladwig** → once retaliation is guaranteed, fringe actors may stage attacks precisely to provoke a crisis.

Calibration under the nuclear overhang

- **Christopher Clary** (Stimson Center, *Four Days in May*) → overt nuclear signalling was lower than in earlier crises; both sides calibrated moves and tested thresholds without clearly crossing them, reading India’s 8–10 May strikes through **Thomas Schelling’s** theory of coercion. **Yusuf and Zeb** → across a quarter century these have been “crises in a nuclearised environment rather than nuclear crises,” both states holding a recessed posture (leaning on **Vipin Narang’s** account of Pakistan’s asymmetric escalation).

The water lever, mediation & the codification question

- **Nishant Sirohi** (ORF) → treaty suspension as legal statecraft, not breach — India paused procedural cooperation without withdrawing or diverting flows, a novel but arguably lawful countermeasure. **Harsh V. Pant** (ORF) → by linking insulated areas such as water and connectivity to security, India signalled that the costs of backing proxy violence would be multidimensional.
- **Mediation & strategic autonomy** → **Pant** reads Washington’s acceptance of India’s counter-terror framing as conditional, not transformative; Trump’s claim to have brokered the ceasefire cut against India’s rejection of third-party mediation — a contest over narratives that served Pakistan’s interest in internationalising the dispute.
- **Doctrine or pattern?** **Soumya Awasthi** (ORF, *The PRAHAAR Doctrine*) → a turn to proactive, escalation-dominant **compellence**, but not yet secure — no formally published counter-terror doctrine, an un-routinised intelligence-to-strike cycle, a narrative advantage that faded within days. **Pant**, one year on, calls it a clearer **pattern of behaviour** rather than a fixed doctrine.

“The retaliation, rather than its threat, is the instrument of coercion — levying tangible costs that force the adversary’s future attacks to be smaller or rarer.” — **Arzan Tarapore**, *War on the Rocks*, 19 May 2025

“It was a calibrated use of force, intended to signal resolve, degrade terrorist infrastructure, and demonstrate capability.” — **Walter Ladwig III**, RUSI, 21 May 2025

“South Asian crises can most aptly be described as crises in a nuclearized environment rather than nuclear crises per se.” — **Moeed Yusuf & Rizwan Zeb**, *Carnegie Endowment*, 2026

“If there is a terrorist attack on India, a fitting reply will be given ... on our terms only ... India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail ... we will not differentiate between the government sponsoring terrorism and the masterminds of terrorism.” — **Narendra Modi**, *Address to the Nation*, 12 May 2025

Practice “Operation Sindoor marks a shift from strategic restraint to deterrence by punishment in India’s policy towards Pakistan.” Critically examine. Examine how the nuclear overhang shapes the space for limited conventional conflict between India and Pakistan, with reference to the 2025 crisis.

6 Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD)

Credible Minimum Deterrence

The quantity of nuclear forces India needs to deter potential nuclear adversaries. Prerequisites: arsenal size keyed to threat perception, the ability to absorb a first strike and retain capability to inflict unacceptable damage; survivability through multiple systems, mobility, dispersion and deception, resting on a **triad**; operational preparedness.

- **Ali Ahmed** → the nuclear doctrine posits inflicting “unacceptable damage” in retaliation, but must genuflect to limitation — conflict termination at the lowest level of nuclear use (the “**Sundarji doctrine**”).
- **K. Subrahmanyam** → credibility is a function of command and control — a chain “**from the political level to the implementing level**” showing “**survivability under the worst conditions of decapitation attack**.” What matters is not the “exchange ratio” but how much punishment an adversary calculates it can accept.

Moderates (deterrence optimists)

Rajesh Basrur → CMD fits India’s strategic culture; unassembled weapons approach **virtual deterrence**. Warns of “**drift**” from a lack of operational clarity.

Ali Ahmed → cultural factors have already produced a more assertive military doctrine.

Expansionists (deterrence pessimists)

Brahma Chellaney → India needs ICBMs; reliance on long-range bombers is “**antithetical to a credible deterrence posture**.”

Bharat Karnad → rejects “minimum” deterrence as “**a real military liability**”; a “**megaton thermonuclear-ICBM**” would let India “**stare down**” China.

Satish Chandra → an open-ended arsenal keyed to threat perception, given China–Pakistan collusion. **Jayant Prasad** → redefine as “**Minimum Credible Deterrence**” and clarify operations. **Raja Menon** → a mismatch between objectives and capabilities. **Vipin Narang** → India’s policy is “**neither credible toward China nor minimal toward Pakistan**.”

The massive-retaliation & command-and-control debates

- A rare cross-camp agreement — most fear the massive-retaliation threat is empty. **Raja Menon** → substitute “**punitive**” for “**massive**.” **Rajesh Rajagopalan** → the doctrine does not use the phrase “**massive retaliation**”; it says “**nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage**.” **Bharat Karnad** → massive retaliation against Pakistani tactical use violates proportionality (the minimum–massive incompatibility).
- The **Nuclear Command Authority** is chaired by the PM, with a Political Council (sole body to authorise use) and an executive council under the NSA. **Raja Menon** → the lack of a Chief of Defence Staff is a serious lacuna; the de-mated posture a “**bizarre arrangement**.” **Verghese Koithara** → higher operationalisation and greater military involvement are essential for reliable deterrence and safety under alert.

Nuclear deterrence against CBW use

Manpreet Sethi (a moderate) objects — it did not work for the US and “hardly makes the Indian nuclear deterrent more credible”; against non-state actors a state-designed deterrent cannot be effective. **Bharat Karnad** and expansionists → it simply keeps an option open, since India has given up its own CBW capacity.

PART C Deterrence, Treaties & the Global Order

7 India, China & Nuclear Deterrence

- **Ashley J. Tellis** → both arsenals are small, unassembled and slowly growing, oriented toward punitive deterrence rather than damage limitation; but “**China’s nuclear deterrent is orders of magnitude more capable than India’s**” — more weapons, larger yields, greater survivability. Further refinement of Agni-V/VI should narrow the city-threatening gap.
- **Gaurav Kampani** → India’s interest in MIRVing land-based missiles may not follow China’s lead — relevance is to Pakistan more than China, and, absent further testing to validate a thermonuclear capability, the onus falls on missile **throw-weight capacity**.
- **Tong Zhao and Toby Dalton** → China sees the US, not India, as its primary nuclear rival and modernises mainly to deter Washington; to Chinese strategists India lacks the will and might to fight Beijing. China worries far more about **India–Pakistan** escalation, and fears India’s prospective battlefield missiles (meant for Pakistan) could also target China.
- **Rukmani Gupta** → in keeping with NFU, neither has openly threatened use, but nuclear status is an unspoken factor in the border dispute. China misrepresents the record, ignores India’s rejection of the unilateral 1959 line proposed by **Zhou Enlai**, and its **CPEC** investment in disputed territory shows it has already taken sides.

8 Non-Proliferation & Disarmament — India’s tradition

- India has long championed disarmament. In 1940, before independence, **Nehru** (in a confidential Wardha note) advocated complete disarmament. **Gandhi**, **Nehru** and **Tagore** opposed nuclear weapons on moral grounds. The **NWFW** commitment is often traced to **M. K. Gandhi** and later **B. R. Ambedkar**.
- **Rajesh Rajagopalan** → India joined multilateral NWFW negotiations enthusiastically without significant output in its favour; security concerns shaped success or failure, and the excessive enthusiasm is hard to explain given the visible limits of Indian influence since the 1950s.
- **Andrew Kennedy** → from the 1960s to 1980s India relied on implicit nuclear umbrellas and institutions rather than weapons — seeing the **PTBT** and **NPT** as ways to constrain China, and backing the **CTBT** and the **Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan (RGAP)** to limit Pakistan. India’s pattern: strong initial enthusiasm turning to bitterness when expectations are not met.

Landmarks in India’s disarmament diplomacy

Year	Initiative
1964	Placed “Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” on the UN agenda — the seed of the future NPT.
1965	A five-point proposal to the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) — a freeze on weapon production and delivery systems.
1978	Negotiations to prohibit the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.
1982	A call for a nuclear freeze on fissile-material production.
1988	Rajiv Gandhi’s UN Action Plan for the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons within a timeframe.
Later	Signed the BWC and CWC ; supported a Nuclear Weapons Convention on the same model. After 1998, reaffirmed the NWFw if all countries opt for complete disarmament.

UPSC 2016 · 10m Socio-economic impacts of the arms race & obstacles to disarmament.

9 India & the Major Treaties — NPT, CTBT, TPNW

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

Purpose → prevent the spread of weapons and technology, promote peaceful uses, work toward disarmament (opened 1968, in force 1970). Structure → divides the world into **NWS** (tested before 1967) and **NNWS**; NWS undertake gradual disarmament, NNWS forgo weapons and accept **IAEA safeguards**. All but **India, Pakistan and Israel** have ratified; North Korea joined in 1985 and withdrew.

Ground	Why India did not join
Discriminatory	Legitimises the P-5 monopoly — “nuclear apartheid” (Jaswant Singh).
Unfair	No obligation on NWS to destroy weapons; “gradual disarmament” an eyewash; no timeframe.
Enforcement problem	Sanctions did not stop North Korea (2006).
IAEA restrictions	Would bar India’s programme even defensively, unacceptable when China was already armed.
Sovereignty & self-reliance	Strategic autonomy; nuclear weapons entwined with national pride and security.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)

The CTBT (drafted by the Conference on Disarmament, 1996) bans all nuclear testing including underground tests, but permits **computer simulation** for improvement. **Article 14** required all 44 nuclear-capable states, India included, to ratify for entry into force.

- India refused — the name is faulty (it should be a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty); **Article 14** violates international law by compelling a state to sign; the 1995 NPT review continued the treaty unchanged.
- Chris Ogden** → the CTBT favoured the P-5, did not carry disarmament forward, and effectively diminished India’s nuclear potential. The 2011 framing: NPT rejected as **discriminatory**, CTBT rejected as **ineffective**.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), 2017

Adopted at a UN conference in New York — a comprehensive ban on development, testing, production, possession, use or threat of use, deployment and assistance. India abstained (with the **US, UK, Russia, China, France, Pakistan and North Korea**). India’s objection → the treaty does not meet expectations on prohibition and elimination; India prefers a comprehensive **Nuclear Weapons Convention** under the CD on three pillars — **prohibition, elimination and verification**.

India’s consolidated position

India upholds universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable disarmament; it does not regard the NPT, CTBT or TPNW as forming customary international law. It reaffirms the NWFw through a gradual, universally committed multilateral framework, and supports a comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Convention within the Conference on Disarmament — the sole multilateral disarmament forum, working by consensus.

UPSC 2015 Implications if India signs NPT and CTBT.

UPSC 2017 · 15m NPT’s failure to achieve disarmament.

UPSC 2022 · 15m

UPSC 2024 · 15m

India’s refusal to sign the NPT.

10 India & the Global Nuclear Order

Multilateral export-control regimes — voluntary, non-binding arrangements among supplier states. India is a member of **three of the four**.

Regime	Scope / gain to India
MTCR (2016)	Curbs proliferation of WMD-capable missiles; gives India access to sensitive missile technologies.
Wassenaar (2017)	Regulates conventional arms and dual-use goods; enhances technology access.
Australia Group (2018)	Controls chemical- and biological-weapons materials.
NSG (not yet)	Bid blocked by China — the last remaining hurdle.

India & the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)

- Case for membership** → a clean non-proliferation record; a credible triad; access to advanced peaceful technologies; the **France precedent** (joined before

acceding to the NPT); support from the US, Russia, Switzerland and Japan; commitment to the FMCT.

- **Obstacles** → non-NPT status; China's insistence on "norm-based" procedures and its linkage of India's bid with Pakistan's. **Rakesh Sood** → China's opposition may reflect anxiety over India's growing capabilities, yet France was inducted without the NPT and China itself did not fully adhere to non-proliferation criteria.
- **Harsh V. Pant** → keep presenting the case to stay in the reckoning. **Shyam Saran** → avoid making the NSG a defining India-China issue; pursue quiet, calibrated diplomacy.

Carving out space

Despite staying outside the NPT, since the **2008 NSG waiver** and the **India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008)** India has secured fuel and technology access and won wide acceptance as a responsible power. **Priya Chacko and Alexander Davis** → India reworked the Cold-War discourse that questioned its ability to handle nuclear capability, linking "responsibility" to nuclear **equality and disarmament** rather than mere non-proliferation — drawing on **Judith Butler's** idea of "**resignification**." India turned compliance into resistance against an inequitable order.

II Challenges to the Nuclear Order in South Asia

- President **Kennedy's** prediction of 15–25 new nuclear states by the 1970s did not come to pass, but the order failed on three basic issues — the status of new NWS outside the NPT; balancing non-proliferation with peaceful uses; stabilising deterrence at the regional level.
- **Complex dynamics** → India and Pakistan acquired deterrence outside the NPT; nuclear weapons prevented major conventional wars, but deterrence stays fragile. Risk factors: non-NPT status, unresolved disputes, cross-border terrorism, doctrinal ambiguities, growing fissile-material production, geographical proximity, weak early-warning systems, absent CBMs.
- **Gregory Koblentz** → strategic stability now depends not only on comparable nuclear forces but on their interaction with non-nuclear technologies — missile defence, anti-satellite and conventional precision-strike weapons.
- **Damaged rule-based order** → the US NSG waiver, reversing thirty years of policy, gave a non-NPT state NPT benefits without a fissile-material freeze, CTBT signature or full-scope safeguards — encouraging horizontal and vertical proliferation.
- **The inferior neighbour** → Pakistan sought weapons to offset conventional inferiority; its low-yield weapons and short-range missiles (60–70 km) answer India's **Cold Start Doctrine**. Neither state is bound by NPT Article VI.

PART D Theory, Assessment & Revision

12 Reading India's Nuclear Policy through IR Theory

Approach	Reading of India's nuclear policy
Realism	Nuclear policy as the pursuit of security and power in an anarchic world; the arsenal deters threats and secures survival and strategic autonomy.
Constructivism	Nuclear identity shaped by historical experience, cultural values and norms of restraint (the NFU pledge) — a distinctive strategic culture.
Liberal Institutionalism	Engagement with multilateral disarmament forums and export-control regimes; support for global norms alongside an independent posture.
Deterrence Theory	Credible minimum deterrence to prevent aggression through assured retaliation.

"Indian leaders have generally considered nuclear weapons at best a necessary evil." — **Rajesh Rajagopalan**

India's NFU is "not so much a strategic choice, but a cultural one." — **Raja Menon**

Framing → **Kenneth Waltz**: nuclear weapons prevent war by ensuring mutual destruction rather than serving offence. **Rajesh Basrur** (on the China rivalry): the argument for "second-strike capability" stems from general principles, not from any sense of an imminent threat from China.

UPSC 2023 · 20m India's nuclear policy as shaped by cultural beliefs and pragmatic foreign policy.

13 Assessment

- India's nuclear trajectory is a "puzzling" one — driven more by domestic organisations and individuals than any single structural compulsion, moving through creep, confusion and consolidation (**Vipin Narang**).
- The doctrine holds restraint and deterrence in balance: **credible minimum deterrence**, **No First Use**, and assured retaliation designed to inflict unacceptable damage, under strict civilian control.
- The unresolved tensions are real → "minimum" against "massive," NFU against a modernising China and a tactical-armed Pakistan, and a triad whose growth strains minimalism.
- India occupies a distinctive place — outside the NPT, CTBT and TPNW on grounds of a discriminatory, disarmament-deficient regime, yet inside the non-proliferation norm and the major export-control arrangements — a de facto power that reframed "responsibility" as a demand for equality.

Nuclear weapons remain unusable weapons whose danger lies less in design than in miscalculation — which is why strong civilian oversight remains the enduring requirement of India's nuclear policy. — **after Verghese Koithara**

14 Power Quotes

"Viewed logically and strategically, nuclear weapons are unusable weapons. Yet, major political or military bungling ... can precipitate their unwitting use." — **Verghese Koithara**

India's path is "a puzzling trajectory, unique amongst nuclear weapons states." — **Vipin Narang**

NFU "obviates the need for the expensive nuclear weapons infrastructure associated with a first-use doctrine." — **Manpreet Sethi**

"The NFU principle is unenforceable ... more a peacetime declaration that a country does not have to abide by during war." — **Bharat Karnad**

"China's nuclear deterrent is orders of magnitude more capable than India's." — **Ashley J. Tellis**

"Indian leaders have generally considered nuclear weapons at best a necessary evil." — **Rajesh Rajagopalan**

15 Scholar Index

Ali Ahmed · B. R. Ambedkar · Shailender Arya · Soumya Awasthi · Rajesh Basrur · Homi Bhabha · David Brostoff · Judith Butler · Priya Chacko · Satish Chandra · D. Suba Chandran · P. R. Chari · Brahma Chellaney · Christopher Clary · Toby Dalton · Alexander Davis · Morarji Desai · Gandhi · Indira Gandhi · Rajiv Gandhi · Rukmani Gupta · Andrew Heywood · Happymon Jacob · Manoj Joshi · Gaurav Kampani · Bharat Karnad · Andrew Kennedy · Gregory Koblenz · Verghese Koithara · Hans Kristensen · Walter Ladwig · Sameer Lalwani · John Mearsheimer · Raja Menon · Shivshankar Menon · Shreya Mitra · C. Raja Mohan · Pulkit Mohan · B. S. Nagal · Vipin Narang · Narasimha Rao · Rajiv Nayar · Nehru · Chris Ogden · Harsh V. Pant · Manohar Parrikar · G. Perkovich · Jayant Prasad · Rajesh Rajagopalan · Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan · Scott D. Sagan · Vikram Sarabhai · Shyam Saran · Thomas Schelling · Homi Sethna · Manpreet Sethi · Lal Bahadur Shastri · Jaswant Singh · Rajnath Singh · Nishant Sirohi · Rakesh Sood · K. Subrahmanyam · Kumar Sundaram · Gen. K. Sundarji · Arzan Tarapore · Tagore · Ashley J. Tellis · Atal Bihari Vajpayee · Kenneth Waltz · Moeed Yusuf · Rizwan Zeb · Tong Zhao · Zhou Enlai

16 How UPSC Asks It — the record, mapped

Theme	Years & marks
India's refusal to sign the NPT	2022 / 15m · 2024 / 15m
NPT's failure to achieve disarmament	2017 / 15m
Signing NPT & CTBT — implications	2015 / 10m
No First Use — change / efficacy	2019 / 15m · 2020 / 15m
India's nuclear doctrine & policy	2016 / 10m · 2023 / 20m
Arms race & obstacles to disarmament	2016 / 10m
India's role in the global nuclear order	2021 / 15m

17 Today's Practice — write before the evening

1. "India's Nuclear policy is deeply influenced by its cultural beliefs and the pragmatic approach of its foreign policy." Discuss. **UPSC 2023 · 20m**
2. Critically examine India's persistent refusal to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) despite being recognized as a de facto nuclear power. **UPSC 2024 · 15m**
3. Discuss the efficacy of India's 'no first use' policy (nuclear weapons) in the context of the evolving strategic challenges from its neighbours. **UPSC 2020 · 15m**

Model answers drop tonight on [@psirbyamitpratap](#). The full treatment is in your Foundation / OGP class notes and handouts. Revise, then write.

See you tomorrow with Day 49 — Recent Developments in Foreign Policy (India & West Asia).