

INDIAN NUCLEAR DOCTRINE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL FOR A MINIMUM NUCLEAR DETERRENT

INTRODUCTION

The recent proposal by India's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) calling for adoption of a policy of minimum nuclear deterrence (MND) has generated considerable concern and controversy. At present, the document represents a draft proposal and not the official policy of the government of India. Nevertheless, such a position, if pursued, threatens to raise serious issues for security and stability in and around the region, and would have significant implications for a range of ongoing arms control and disarmament initiatives.

Already, the document threatens to further complicate progress on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Not only could New Delhi's active pursuit of a nuclear deterrent work to scuttle Conference efforts to expedite the Treaty's entry into force, but could well generate concerns about the future integrity and value of the regime itself.

This report offers an early examination of the proposed doctrine. More precisely, it outlines and critically assesses: 1) the doctrine's justification, 2) the economic and technical feasibility of attaining it, and 3) its potential impacts on both regional security and ongoing international disarmament initiatives (i.e. the CTBT Article XIV Conference). The report concludes with some suggestions on how the doctrine might be addressed by the international community, including Canada.

PROPOSED DOCTRINE: RATIONALE AND CHARACTER

The NSAB's proposal is premised on the belief that the threat posed by existing nuclear arsenals and "first use" doctrines represents a grave and still inadequately addressed threat to international peace, security and national sovereignty. In fact, the continued existence of such threats reflects a "virtual abandonment of nuclear disarmament" on the part of the declared Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). Such circumstances – along with the nation's inalienable right to self-defence – demands the acquisition of effective, credible, nuclear deterrence.¹

The possession of an adequate retaliatory capability represents the foundation of the doctrine. Yet in the case of India, the circumstances triggering nuclear retaliation would be strictly limited. Nuclear arms would exist exclusively for deterring nuclear attack, and would thus be employed solely for the purpose of retaliation-in-kind. The first use of nuclear options would be explicitly rejected.²

¹ National Security Advisory Board, *Indian Nuclear Doctrine* (Government of India, 1999), pp. 1-2.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.