

3. India's Approach Towards Nuclear Energy and Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

V. C. TRIVEDI

Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, India

The long-standing and abiding interest of the Government of India in disarmament and arms limitation is well known. In India's view, international security and lasting international peace can be based only on disarmament and not on concepts of balance of power, or spheres of influence, or big-power relationships. India has been consistently of the view that the objective before the international community must continue to be general and complete disarmament and, in particular, the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction; measures which run counter to this objective or which tend to divert the nations of the world from its realization should be avoided. India does not view international problems or relationships from a military point of view; such an approach is alien to India's cultural heritage, centuries-old history, and national policies, as well as to the present and future socio-economic needs of its vast population. India sees no validity in nomenclatures like "threshold powers" or "nuclear explosive powers," nor in distinctions made between one peaceful application of science and technology and another.

The basic feature and first enunciation of the Indian approach on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons came on April 2, 1954, in Jawaharlal Nehru's landmark statement to the Indian Parliament. In commenting on the Soviet and American thermonuclear tests, he said, "The general position of this country in this matter has been repeatedly stated and placed beyond all doubt." He proposed a "standstill agreement" of nuclear weapon tests, an agreement to discontinue production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons, and the eventual prohibition and elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. "It is up to us," Nehru stated, "to pursue as best as we can the objective we seek. We have maintained that nuclear (including thermonuclear), chemical and biological (bacterial) knowledge and power should not be used to forge these weapons of mass destruction."

India has consistently followed these basic principles on non-proliferation:

1) a non-proliferation treaty should prohibit production of nuclear weapons by all countries; that is, without any discrimination between nuclear-weapon powers and non-nuclear-weapon powers (being a partial measure, the Treaty could not deal substantially with the problem of existing arsenals of nuclear weapons);

2) a treaty should prohibit transfer of nuclear weapons to all countries;

3) as the cessation of production of fissile material for weapon purposes would contribute to the prohibition of production of nuclear weapons, safeguards should be applied to the appropriate nuclear facilities of all countries and should be universal, objective, functional and non-discriminatory so as to ensure that fissile material is used only for peaceful purposes;

4) the Treaty should constitute a concrete step towards general and complete disarmament and especially towards nuclear disarmament; and

5) it should be a treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and should not prohibit any peaceful uses of nuclear energy or technology.

The only effective way to curb future or probable proliferation is to curb existing and real proliferation. That was the approach followed by the international community in the early days. In 1945, it was clear, as President Truman pointed out, that the choice was between "renunciation of the use and development of the atomic bomb" and "a desperate armament race which might well end in disaster." The failure of international attempts at control led, as he predicted in another context, to the emergence of two nuclear weapon powers, then a third and a fourth and a fifth. This appears to have happened for reasons of prestige or security, or a combination of the two. There has been talk all along of a top table, a select club, and the notion of exclusive prerogatives and untrammelled privilege for nuclear weapon powers. The Non-Proliferation Treaty in fact gives weapon proliferation privileges to nuclear weapon powers and exclusive prerogatives in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. As for security, nations which view international relationships principally in a military framework have equated their security with nuclear weapons and accordingly have either acquired them or sought alliances with nuclear weapon powers or protection from them.

India's approach to these questions has been based on the concepts of disarmament and arms limitation in the international field and economic development and social justice on the domestic front. The existing realities have always been taken into account; India, contrary to popular misconceptions, has not proposed the dismantling of a single nuclear weapon, the destruction of a single nuclear delivery vehicle, or the abolition of a single nuclear base. What India has envisaged was the cessation, without discrimination, of the use of fissile material for the production of nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapon powers have multiple destruction or overkill

capability, and such a proposal in itself would not affect that awesome power by any means.

India's commitment to the use of nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes has been made abundantly clear over the years. It was the first country after the Original Parties to sign the Partial Test Ban Treaty in Moscow. It has acceded to the Seabed Treaty and has signed and ratified the Convention on Biological and Toxin Weapons. It adopted the Atomic Energy Act in April 1948 and set up its Atomic Energy Commission in August 1948, one year after independence. Indian engineers and scientists designed, built and commissioned the first research reactor in Asia in 1956, built India's own fuel element fabrication plant in 1959 and her first plutonium separation plant in 1964. There was thus nothing to prevent India from exploding a nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967, the date separating the era of nuclear-weapon powers from the non-nuclear-weapon powers under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Self reliance and economic and social development have been the objectives of India's nuclear energy program from its inception. India has embarked on a comprehensive program of constructing nuclear facilities and training scientists, engineers, technicians and other experts so that it does not have to be dependent on other countries, whether in the production of radioisotopes or peaceful nuclear explosions for economic development. The experiment carried out on May 18, 1974, was, to quote the official announcement issued on that day, a "part of the program of study of peaceful uses of nuclear explosions," and was designed to keep abreast of this technology. The international community has long advocated the need for pursuing such programs—in the Atoms for Peace conferences, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and in the United Nations. The United States and the Soviet Union have indicated notable successes in peaceful applications of nuclear explosions; their latest agreement on cessation of underground nuclear weapon tests above 150 kilotons after March 1976 specifically excludes peaceful nuclear explosions.

As far as India is concerned, it is somewhat premature to speak of actual applications, as the data of the experiment of May 18 are still being collected. All information regarding this completely contained explosion so far available has been published. Final results will also be shared with the international scientific community.

India's economic needs are obvious and urgent, and the peaceful nuclear explosion experiment is of particular relevance, in the present oil situation and the acute balance of payments difficulties experienced in that context. India produces about 7 million tons of crude every year but needs to import another 15 million tons, even on the basis of 1973 requirements. Imports of this magnitude at the current prices would mean the expenditure of nearly half of India's entire foreign exchange earnings. We are forced

to devote greater attention to devising new methods of exploiting our own oil resources. We believe that the cheapest, if not the only way of exploiting some oil wells with high viscosity (say in Gujarat, where there are such wells not now exploited) is by using underground nuclear explosions. For this, and for other practical applications, our Oil and Natural Gas Commission has been attracted to gas stimulation for quite some time. Although the indications so far have been encouraging, a definite answer will have to await the conclusion of the findings of the May 18 experiment. India also has deposits of low-grade copper and other minerals which offer additional possibilities for exploitation through nuclear explosives.

The thesis that there should be a privileged class and a non-privileged class in respect of science and technology is unacceptable and a negation of the entire development of modern society. At the 1956 Conference on the Statute of the IAEA, Dr. Homi Bhabha remarked: "Some fifty years ago, countries in Asia and Africa under colonial domination were informed that their proper and fitting role was to supply raw materials and that industrial production was beyond their capacity. We, for example, were told that the making of steel in India would be uneconomic, if not impossible, whereas we make today the cheapest steel in the world."

India refuses to believe that the technology of peaceful nuclear explosions should be denied to poor countries or to countries which do not proliferate nuclear weapons. Every country is entitled to its own judgment; during the debate on the treaty on non-proliferation India made no attempt to lobby for its view of that Treaty, especially after a large number of countries agreed to the Treaty. It has continued its constructive approach with countries supporting the NPT in the area of international safeguards as well, and has played a key role in the Safeguards Committee of the IAEA to ensure smooth and speedy approval of various specific agreements in the Board of Governors.

As to safeguards in general, India's position is that they should be functional, objective, universal and non-discriminatory. If safeguards were to be applied mainly in the developing countries because they are obliged to import equipment and technicians from affluent industrialized countries, it would be an invidious regime. Similarly, if safeguards do not apply to the nuclear-weapon powers, but only to the weak and the underprivileged, they would constitute an instrument for the perpetuation of the status quo.

India has spoken since the fifties about observance and regulation of peaceful nuclear explosions, but still maintains that the first priority should be given to the conclusion of a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons tests underground. It is only after the prohibition of the use of nuclear energy for weapons has come into effect that the international community can appropriately and effectively consider the question of regulating the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including underground nuclear explosions for

economic development. India is prepared to cooperate with other nations in this objective framework.

"The Western Governments cannot leave things where they are today," said Nobel Laureate Philip Noel-Baker. "Either the safeguards of IAEA inspection will become the instrument of control over nuclear disarmament for the world at large, or it may soon become a farce . . . It cannot be used to keep the non-nuclear powers disarmed, while the nuclear powers continue to pile up or to retain great stocks of atomic and hydrogen weapons, large and small. The purpose of the IAEA is to demilitarize atomic energy; either that purpose must be fully and speedily achieved, or the IAEA, and the hopes built upon it, will all fail."