



Global Discourse on Nuclear Weapons

This editorial is based on [“The Return of Nuclear Weapons”](#) which was published in Indian Express on 30/08/2022. It talks about the failure of the recently held NPT Review Conference in creating a consensus and the implications of the same on India’s nuclear developments.

For Prelims: Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), India’s doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU), Cold War, Weapons of Mass Destruction, New START Treaty, India’s Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act of 2010

For Mains: India’s stand on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), India’s doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU), India as a Nuclear Power, Nuclear Energy and India, Impact of Global Nuclear Pact controversies on India

Recently the **tenth international conference to review the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty \(NPT\)](#)** concluded at the **[United Nations](#)** in New York. The conference, however, **ended without a consensus document** which was quite unexpected in present times when several major powers are in conflict.

Another disappointing fact is that India, despite being one of the nuclear powers, has shown **little interest in NPT review**. What the need of the hour is for **India to pay a lot more attention to the international nuclear discourse** that is acquiring new dimensions and **take a relook at its own civilian and military nuclear programmes**.

What are the Important Points about the NPT?

- **About Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty:** The NPT is an international treaty whose **objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons** and weapons technology, to **foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy**, and to further the goal of disarmament.
 - It was **signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970**. Presently, it has **191 member states**.
 - India is not a member.
 - The treaty requires countries to give up any present or future plans to build nuclear weapons in return for access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
 - It represents the **only binding commitment** in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the **nuclear-weapon States (NWS)** (those who manufactured/exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive devices before 1st January, 1967).
- **NPT Review Conference:** The parties to the NPT, which came into force in 1970, undertake a **review of the treaty’s implementation every five years**.
 - The Tenth Review Conference, scheduled for 2020, was delayed because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

What about India’s Nuclear Developments?

- **Historical Background:** Nuclear programme of India was **initiated in the late 1940s** under the guidance of **Homi J. Bhabha**.
 - The **first nuclear explosion** undertaken by India in **May 1974**.
 - India conducted a **series of nuclear tests in May 1998**, demonstrating its capacity to use nuclear energy for military purposes.
 - After the 1998 tests, India enunciated a **doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU)** of nuclear weapons which was formally adopted in January, 2003.
 - It says that **nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack** on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere.
- **Major Obstruction:** In the immediate aftermath of the **Cold War**, the US attempted to roll back India's nuclear and missile programmes which generated serious concerns in the latter.
 - After the nuclear tests in May 1998, **India also faced economic sanctions from the US**.
- **India-US Nuclear Deal:** Few years after the sanctions, the historic **India-US civil nuclear initiative** in 2005 produced a framework that ended India's extended conflict with the NPT system.
 - The deal resulted in the **separation of India's civil and military nuclear programmes**.
 - It was after a few years of this deal when **India regained the freedom to develop its nuclear arsenal and resume civilian nuclear cooperation with the rest of the world** (which was blocked since India's first nuclear test in May 1974).
- **Current Scenario:** In 2018, **India completed its Nuclear Triad** as stated in its Nuclear Doctrine.
 - A Nuclear triad is a three-sided military-force structure consisting of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.
 - However, it needs to be noted that even about a decade-and-a-half since the Indo-US Nuclear deal, **India has not bought a single nuclear reactor from the US**.

What are the Issues Related to the Failure of NPT Review Conference?

- **Deepening Divide among Powers:** The failure of the 10th Review Conference reveals a deepening **divide between the main sponsors of the NPT - the US and Russia**, a strong support for the NPT, even at the peak of the Cold War, was one **major area of cooperation between the US and the erstwhile Soviet Union**.
 - In the conference, **Russia objected to critical references to its military control over the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant** in Ukraine.
 - The **nuclear problems of the Middle East involving Israel and Iran** have also prevented successful outcomes at the NPT review conferences.
 - The 9th Review conference in 2015 ended without an agreement due to major differences over establishing a **Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction**.
- **Apprehensions of Non-Nuclear State Parties:** These parties have usually complained about the **lack of progress in implementing the disarmament** provisions of the NPT. The **absence of any dialogue on the arms control** by the nuclear powers has only worsened the situation.
 - The NWS, rather than reducing the salience of nuclear weapons, have started **putting greater emphasis on their strategic utility**.
 - Moreover, the **invasion of Ukraine**, a non-nuclear weapon state by Russia, a nuclear weapon power, further exacerbated the threat that non-nuclear states face.
 - The **Russian President threatened the use of nuclear weapons** on Ukraine.
- **China as a Special Threat:** For the countries in Asia, **China's growing assertiveness** is a similar concern. The fear that **China might use its nuclear strength to seize the territories** of its neighbours, is real.
 - China is **also critical of the southeast Asian countries approving of the AUKUS grouping** and claims it as **violative of the provisions of the NPT**.
 - In the 10th Review conference, **Indonesia and Malaysia too raised concerns** about the implications of the AUKUS deal for the NPT.

What should the Current Global Nuclear Discourse Result in?

- Rising energy demands have led to a growing number of countries pursuing nuclear energy, and many countries wish to be energy-independent, in order to ensure a sustainable and dependable domestic energy supply.
 - Thus, the **international community should focus on reconciling the states' desire for energy independence with their desire to both reduce the intrusiveness of [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#) safeguards and diminish the possibility of proliferation.**
- Although the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) welcome [New START](#) and other initiatives, they are **willing to see more concrete actions on reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national security doctrines, reducing alert levels, and increasing transparency.**
- More regions in the world, preferably comprising NWS, should enter into an **arrangement of establishing Nuclear-weapon-free zones.**

What should be the Key Areas of Focus for India?

- **Enhancing Nuclear Power:** India must **recognise and adapt to the changing global nuclear discourse** as major instruments of great power military strategy. It must also **examine the potential** of its nuclear weapons, **if it is capable of deterring the expanding atomic arsenal of its rivals.**
 - After 1998, India premised its strategy on building **“credible minimum deterrence”**.
 - The time has come to reflect on the “credible” side of that strategy and redefine what the ‘minimum’ might be.
 - Also, India must **gradually revise its posture of ‘active deterrence’ to ‘dissuasive deterrence’** by building up its infrastructure along the border and improving the surveillance and warning capabilities among other things.
- **Enhancing Nuclear Energy Potential:** India, which commissioned Asia’s first nuclear power station more than 50 years ago, is currently stuck with a total generating capacity of barely 7,000 MW.
 - **India must find ways to end the current dormancy in its civilian nuclear power generation,** especially at a time when it has outlined an ambitious programme to reduce the share of fossil fuels in its energy consumption.
- **Revisiting Civil Nuclear Liability Act:** India’s civil nuclear initiative was meant to **open up international collaboration to boost the production** of atomic electric power.
 - However, the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act of 2010 made it impossible for private players – internal and external – to contribute** to the programme.
 - **Revisiting that law is an urgent imperative** for any Indian strategy to rapidly raise the contribution of nuclear power to India’s energy mix.

Drishti Mains Question

The current global stand for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is gradually changing. Discuss the key areas on which India should focus to adapt to this change.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. What is/are the consequence/consequences of a country becoming the member of the ‘Nuclear Suppliers Group’? (2018)

1. It will have access to the latest and most efficient nuclear technologies.
2. It automatically becomes a member of “The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)”.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (a)

Q. Consider the following countries: (2015)

1. China
2. France
3. India
4. Israel
5. Pakistan

Which among the above are Nuclear Weapons States as recognized by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
- (c) 2, 4 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: (a)

Q. In the Indian context, what is the implication of ratifying the 'Additional Protocol' with the 'International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'? (2018)

- (a) The civilian nuclear reactors come under IAEA safeguards.
- (b) The military nuclear installations come under the inspection of IAEA.
- (c) The country will have the privilege to buy uranium from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- (d) The country automatically becomes a member of the NSG.

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. With growing scarcity of fossil fuels, the atomic energy is gaining more and more significance in India. Discuss the availability of raw material required for the generation of atomic energy in India and in the world. **(2013)**

Q. In what ways would the ongoing U.S-Iran Nuclear Pact Controversy affect the national interest of India? How should India respond to this situation? **(2018)**

Q. With growing energy needs should India keep on expanding its nuclear energy programme? Discuss the facts and fears associated with nuclear energy. **(2018)**

Q. Give an account of the growth and development of nuclear science and technology in India. What is the advantage of fast breeder reactor programme in India? **(2017)**