



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss India's nuclear doctrine and its relevance in the contemporary geopolitical environment. Should India consider revising its No-First-Use policy given the changing global security dynamics? **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing about India's nuclear doctrine
- Give key principles of India's Nuclear Doctrine and highlight the Relevance of India's Nuclear Doctrine in the Current Geopolitical Landscape
- Give Arguments in Favor and Against of Revising NFU
- Suggest Measures for Strengthening India's nuclear policy
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

India's nuclear doctrine is rooted in its **No-First-Use (NFU) policy** and **Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD)**, ensuring strategic stability in the region.

- Since officially declaring itself a nuclear weapons state in **1998**, India has maintained a defensive posture, emphasizing deterrence over aggression.

Body

India's Nuclear Doctrine: Key Principles

- **No-First-Use (NFU):** India pledges **not to use nuclear weapons unless attacked first with nuclear weapons.**
- **Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD):** India maintains a nuclear arsenal sufficient for **deterrence but not for aggressive posturing.**
- **Massive Retaliation:** Any nuclear attack on India or its forces would invite a massive **retaliation designed to cause unacceptable damage.**
- **Non-Use Against Non-Nuclear States:** India commits to **not using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states.**

Relevance of India's Nuclear Doctrine in the Current Geopolitical Landscape

- **Balancing Nuclear Deterrence with Disarmament Advocacy:** India calls for a **time-bound framework for universal disarmament** in international forums like the **Conference on Disarmament (CD), United Nations (UN), and IAEA.**
 - However, as of 2023, India possesses **around 160 nuclear warheads**, and its continued modernization, including **submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) like K-4**, signals a **commitment to strengthening deterrence** even while supporting non-proliferation.

- **Managing the China-Pakistan Nuclear Axis:** India faces a **two-front nuclear threat from China and Pakistan**, making nuclear deterrence a strategic necessity.
 - China is rapidly modernizing its **nuclear triad, hypersonic missiles, and MIRV capabilities**, raising concerns for India's security.
 - Pakistan's **full-spectrum deterrence policy** includes low-yield TNWs, which could be used in conventional conflicts, challenging India's **massive retaliation doctrine**.
- **Emerging Technologies and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence:** The introduction of **hypersonic weapons, cyberwarfare, and AI-driven nuclear command systems** poses new challenges to India's nuclear posture.
 - The **2019 Kudankulam nuclear power plant cyberattack** demonstrated vulnerabilities in India's nuclear infrastructure.

Should India Revise Its No-First-Use (NFU) Policy?

Arguments in Favor of Revising NFU	Arguments Against Revising NFU
1. Adapting to Pakistan's TNWs - Pakistan's tactical nukes lower the nuclear threshold, making India's massive retaliation less credible. A flexible posture could strengthen deterrence.	1. India's Responsible Image - NFU aligns with India's global disarmament commitment and enhances diplomatic credibility. A shift could appear escalatory.
2. Countering China's Nuclear Expansion - China's growing arsenal and Indo-Pacific assertiveness challenge India's deterrence. A more ambiguous doctrine could strengthen deterrence.	2. Avoiding a South Asian Arms Race - Moving away from NFU could push Pakistan toward a more aggressive nuclear posture, heightening instability.
3. Strategic Signaling - A flexible nuclear policy prevents adversaries from assuming India's response will always be restrained, reducing miscalculations.	3. Strengthening Second-Strike Instead - Instead of revising NFU, India can bolster deterrence by:

Strengthening India's Nuclear Strategy:

- **Modernizing India's Nuclear Deterrent**
 - **Develop Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs)** to enhance second-strike capability.
 - **Advance India's submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) program** for assured deterrence.
- **Enhancing Strategic Communication and Ambiguity**
 - **Retain NFU but introduce strategic ambiguity** to increase deterrence flexibility.
 - **Clarify conditions for nuclear retaliation**, ensuring adversaries do not exploit India's doctrine.
- **Expanding India's Diplomatic Engagement in Global Arms Control**
 - **Advocate for a multilateral No First Use (NFU) Treaty** to bring China and Pakistan into a similar nuclear restraint regime.
 - **Strengthen engagement with NSG, IAEA, and global arms control initiatives** to shape nuclear non-proliferation norms.

Conclusion

While **shifting to a first-use policy may increase risks of escalation**, strengthening **second-strike capabilities, enhancing strategic ambiguity, and modernizing nuclear deterrence** would be a more **balanced and responsible** approach.

