The Road to Nuclear Zero:
Rhetoric or Reality?

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India-Japan relations are an important inflexion point, where we have, earlier, rarely had the opportunity of exchanging views on matters of strategic importance to both our countries, particularly in the areas of nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear weapons in general. Both India and Japan face threats of a nuclear nature, both overt and latent, yet have been at the forefront of supporting the cause of a world free of nuclear weapons. India is a nuclear-armed state, faces two nuclear armed neighbours with whom it has, if not hostile, at the least, adversarial relations, including territorial disagreements, while Japan, which is protected by a nuclear umbrella, also faces dangers from two nuclear armed neighbours. Yet, both countries appear to remain staunch in their support of Nuclear Zero—the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Both countries have often sponsored resolutions in the UN calling for nuclear disarmament, but, unfortunately, almost always, separately.

The stances of both countries might smack of what is sought to be dismissed as 'rhetoric' but are, in fact, reflective of not only a humanitarian element in their foreign policies, but essentially an aspirational one with a strategic focus, a realist approach. Therefore, we need to be clear as to

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what is meant by 'rhetoric' and what the reality is and how this affects the almost universal aspiration for Nuclear Zero, of course, arguing only from an Indian perspective in the author's case.

From the time nuclear weapons entered the arsenals of the politically powerful countries, there has been widespread global opinion against them. India's reaction to the horrific bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was, with the rest of the world, one of horror and moral revulsion, with an element of fear of these weapons and their impact. Prime Minister Nehru, presciently wrote in 1954 that "fear would grow and grip nations and peoples and each would try frantically to get this new weapon or some adequate protection from it…(because before these weapons) our normal weapons are completely useless." This dual approach to nuclear weapons—moral revulsion, on the one hand, and the need for protection from them, on the other—has majorly affected India's views on nuclear weapons and led to its call for nuclear disarmament. This had also determined its reactions to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the NPT, which, India believed, legitimised nuclear weapons even while giving them political significance and power. The same can be said of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) which, without a commitment by nuclear weapon states to total disarmament in a time-bound framework, sought to restrain other states, regardless of their security needs, to a less powerful and more vulnerable state. Yet, but perhaps because of this perspective, India declared itself a nuclear weapon state in 1998.

The narrative of India's emergence as a nuclear-armed state has been commented on and the decision to go nuclear arose principally from the rejection of a major initiative by India, the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for ushering in a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-Violent World Order at the UN Special Session on Disarmament in 1988, which *inter alia,* proposed a new bargain between the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and Non-Nuclear Weapon States NNWS—that the latter would not 'cross the threshhold' if the NWS would accept a step-by-step approach to the elimination

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of their nuclear weapons and to a Nuclear Weapons Convention banning such weapons. To this rejection was added the more urgent security imperative: reliable information that China was assisting Pakistan in building the latter's nuclear weapons capability. India's own capability to weaponise, should that political decision be taken, was a contributing factor to the decision taken by that fervent supporter of nuclear disarmament, Rajiv Gandhi. It becomes significant in this context to take note of India's nuclear doctrine, which contains a "… continued commitment to the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world, through global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament." Together with this commitment, India spelt out its decision of a credible minimum deterrent and a no first use of nuclear weapons, and no use against non-nuclear weapon states except in the case of an attack by any other Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). Clearly, in India's view, nuclear weapons are seen as a political weapon to deter nuclear and other WMD attacks and not a weapon for battlefield use. The logical future of such a posture would necessarily be a world free of nuclear weapons, chemical and biological weapons use having already been banned by international treaties. Can this argument be dismissed as 'rhetoric' or 'pacifist idealism'?

It has to be recognised that India has not been alone in championing the cause of Nuclear Zero. There has been a variety of initiatives taken by governments and non-governmental groups with greater or less influence on decisions relating to nuclear weapons. These include the New Agenda Coalition—Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden—the Middle Powers Initiative, and more recently, the NPDI, the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative of which Japan

is a lead member. India had earlier been at the forefront of such meetings in the past, but with most of these initiatives located within the NPT framework, such participation has declined. At the non-governmental level, we have Global Zero, the Canberra Commission (a successor of other earlier similar commissions), the WMD Commission and the ICNND, the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament of which again, Japan is a leading member. In spite of these efforts and mass campaigns, however, there is no doubt that the impact on decision-makers in the states with nuclear weapons has been marginal. As the UN Secretary General noted earlier in 2013, "… the disarmament process is off track." There are many roads but so far, few have been willing to actually take any of them.

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Before turning to the issue of why countries want, or want to retain, nuclear weapons in their arsenals, and the how of future actions, two specific cases illustrate the challenges today. First comes the case of the US and Russia, the two countries with the largest number of nuclear weapons, where the environment for disarmament appears to have entered a period of chill. After the initiative of the four US statesmen in promoting the idea of Global Zero and President Obama's speech in Prague in 2009, the momentum towards Global Zero seems to have lost much of its traction. It will be recalled that the US President had, in his speech, not just supported but committed his country to "seek peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" and announced that his country would "reduce the role of nuclear weapons in (its) national security strategy". However, those against such moves in his country

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have managed to dilute the urgency of the commitment, though the US Nuclear Posture Review of 2010 showed some efforts towards reducing the salience of nuclear weapons and the US-Russia agreement to limit warheads for strategic nuclear forces to 1,550 has taken place. In the meanwhile, developments in Russia have not boded well for global nuclear disarmament. At a meeting of the Conference on Disarmament in 2011, the Russian Foreign Minister spelt out five conditions which could be taken to represent Russia's position on nuclear disarmament: the need to take into account in any discussion on nuclear disarmament, strategic conventionally armed weapons, weapons in space, any system of the multilateral global missile defence, and the inclusion of the UK, France and China (and may be others) in future arms control negotiations. The fear of US conventional superiority would seem to determine Russia's position. In fact, at the meeting in Berlin in 2013, President Obama, still trying to push his agenda for Nuclear Zero, proposed a new round of arms control negotiations to slash the arsenals of the two countries by one-third, but was met with a frosty response. In addition, Russia which earlier had a no first use doctrine, has reverted to a first strike position, but has restricted it to a threat to "Russia's existence", tightening the definition of "situations critical to national security." Russia seeks to use nuclear weapons to offset the asymmetric military power and advantage of the US, a pattern replicated in the following case.

China has three nuclear armed neighbours, but its attention is fixed on the nuclear power of the US, with which it seeks parity in capability. It claims that the origins of its programme were to enable it to withstand nuclear blackmail and coercion. Today, it says that its nuclear arsenal "reflects the comprehensive power of the country", according to a

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senior Chinese General from the nuclear establishment. Even though it has a no first use doctrine, caveats are frequently reported to have been included, responding to its identification of its 'core interests' and which would presumably constitute its 'red lines'. While there is little likelihood of actual nuclear hostilities breaking out with either Russia or the US, China's military modernisation keeps the pot boiling, as it were.

China's stand on nuclear disarmament has been weighed down with several preconditions. In 2010, China formally announced, that the establishment of a new and fair international order would be a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament, that there should be a "gradual reduction (of nuclear weapons) and downward balance, maintaining stability and not compromising the security interest of any country", that a global strategic balance and stability is a precondition for progress in nuclear disarmament, that global ballistic missile defence programmes would act as an obstacle to the elimination of nuclear weapons and that other countries should pursue a no first use strategy like China. It has also called for the control of weapons in space. It is only after these conditions are met that a Nuclear Weapon Convention should be negotiated.

The situation in northeast Asia has become more fragile as North Korea, China's protégé, has now become nuclear capable and possibly has a few weapons in its arsenal. The belligerence of North Korea and China's flexing of muscle on territorial issues pose challenges to technologically advanced Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, all currently covered by the US "extended deterrence". The US' commitment to its responsibilities to its allies has influenced greatly its own move towards meeting President Obama's objectives.

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assisted that country in its search for a nuclear deterrent to India. It has been held by some that Pakistan 'went nuclear' because of India, whereas the fact is the obverse. Sino-Pak nuclear collaboration in the creation of the latter's nuclear weapon capabilities has been clearly established, to the extent that a US scientist, an invited observer to the Chinese nuclear programme, has stated that "… during Benazir Bhutto's initial term in office, the People's Republic of China tested Pakistan's first A-bomb on their behalf on May 26, 1990, at the Lop Nor test site." As already pointed out above, India's decision to weaponise its capabilities was taken in reaction to Sino-Pak collaboration. While rejecting the CTBT at the Conference on Disarmament in June 1996, India said, "Our capability is demonstrated but, as a matter of policy, we exercise restraint. Countries around us continue their weapon programmes, either openly or in a clandestine manner. In such an environment, India cannot accept any restraints on its capability." Unfortunately, this clear statement was not taken into account by the nuclear weapon states and others that were intent on having a CTBT at all costs.

Pakistan's search for nuclear weapons capability has been widely reported on, most recently in a book by an insider to the Pakistani programme, Feroz Khan, called *Eating Grass*—a reference to ZA Bhutto's promise that Pakistan would develop nuclear weapons even if its people had "to eat grass". The recent introduction of tactical nuclear weapons by Pakistan, not only into its arsenal but into its doctrine for battlefield use has introduced a significant degree of uncertainty in the region. While both China and Pakistan have publicly held that they are in favour of a nuclear weapon free world, at the moment, the stances adopted by

both would seem to indicate otherwise. A distinction has, however, to be made between the two positions: to Pakistan, its nuclear weapons have a value that appears to have been projected as a part of that nation's nationhood. Even though its Nuclear Command Authority reiterated, in 2011, Pakistan's desire to contribute to a world free of nuclear weapons, from its statements and actions, its programme is India-centric and developed to counter, not only India's nuclear capability, but its conventional superiority. This makes any meaningful dialogue on global nuclear disarmament more complex to achieve.

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This then is the reality. For any argument in favour of nuclear disarmament, there is a counter argument in favour of either retaining or of acquiring nuclear weapons. Essentially, the cause for both is security, national security or the security of a particular regime. James Acton and George Perkovich have commented on this in some detail, but have misleadingly also identified prestige, status and domestic pressures as possible reasons why nuclear weapon states wish to retain their weapons. While this might be true of the UK and France today, it does not appear to be the *raison d'etre* for the other nuclear armed states. The way forward must, therefore, lie in ways by which the security concerns of these countries are handled.

Turning to the question of whether planning a road map towards Nuclear Zero is mere 'rhetoric, we need to be clear on whether the rhetoric is used to either dismiss the various arguments in favour of Nuclear Zero or whether its use is to mask covert efforts to acquire, maintain

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and increase nuclear arsenals.To describe the multitudinous calls of the international community for a nuclear weapon free world as 'rhetoric', is to dismiss the demands of the international community. Nuclear Zero is an aspiration for the majority of countries of the world. The dangers of nuclear terrorism have recently focussed global attention on nuclear security and safety of fissile materials, but these are minute, though welcome, steps forward. Without verification, however, this may remain a dangerous area. In other words, in a sense, it may remain mere 'rhetoric'. The dictionary has two different meanings of the word 'rhetoric': the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, or language with a persuasive or impressive effect but often lacking sincerity or meaningful content. We could use rhetoric in the first sense—to effectively persuade those who look at nuclear weapons as the only way in which to protect their security. But that alone would clearly not be enough if security concerns are ignored. This would not mean that all political issues between countries need to be solved before we contemplate Nuclear Zero, which is what many commentators have claimed. It would be sufficient if these weapons were delegitimised and their salience in the strategic doctrines of states reduced. Reductions are bound to follow, if for nothing else, for reasons of cost and danger of accidents. It would be a move that would be more realistic and could cope with ideological, long held assumptions.

Already nuclear weapons are becoming obsolete as smaller, smarter and more efficient conventional weapons are inducted into the fighting capabilities of Armies around the world. The world will unfortunately always know war; the effort would have to be to minimise the impact of wars on humans and on the environment, on Earth, if you will. Technology, therefore, could lead us to a situation where nuclear

weapons are overtaken by other more precise, more effective and perhaps less expensive weapons. This could persuade countries and persons who today value nuclear weapons as the crown jewels, to reconsider the actual value of an obsolete system. Would these new weapons be as deadly, create as much fear and promise as much destruction as nuclear weapons? Oppenheimer's well known remark: "Now I am death, destroyer of worlds" is unlikely to apply to weapons which are targeted, where worlds are not in danger of being destroyed. The recent use of chemical weapons in a conflict situation, in spite of a near universal treaty and a global norm against their use, is indicative of the dangers to the world, to peace and security and to human life..

To conclude, India and Japan have had similar views about nuclear disarmament but have rarely cooperated globally on the pursuit of this goal. Given the dangers both countries face, perhaps the time has come to start a dialogue on how we could cooperate to promote, not through another commission, which would be 'rhetoric' in the sense of persuasion but by using our joint strengths, to make these weapons obsolete even while pushing for a delegitimisation of such weapons. We need to accept the security concerns of countries and deal with them—that would be a realistic approach.