



India's Options

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Having rejected a flawed test ban treaty, India should now lead the way to true disarmament.

Achieving a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTB) was a long-held goal of nuclear disarmament advocates. It has been signed by all five declared nuclear weapon states as well as by Israel. Yet, its future is cloudy. India, whose signature is needed for ratification, has refused to sign because the CTB does not reflect a commitment by the nuclear powers to nuclear disarmament. Under the treaty, the nuclear weapon states can:

- Design nuclear weapons by using a variety of laboratory testing programs.
- Maintain nuclear test sites in states of constant readiness.
- Withdraw from the treaty without penalty under a standard “supreme national interest” clause, which would enable nearly complete designs to be fully tested.
- Conduct subcritical tests underground, which would make it extremely difficult or impossible to verify whether small nuclear yields are actually being produced.
- Maintain huge weapons-design teams as well as archives that preserve the designs of nuclear weapons no longer in arsenals.

That the CTB would permit these activities was seen as a problem by the majority of non-nuclear states that signed on, as well as by Russia and China, which cannot afford the degree of laboratory testing and computer simulation that the United States plans.

But these states eventually went along with the CTB because it had been a long-sought goal; because it represented at least modest progress; and because it would help stem horizontal proliferation.

India may continue to stand aloof from the CTB while keeping its nuclear options open. The notion that India should go its own way has strong support in India, given the fact that — apart from China — the governments of nuclear weapon states seem to have no intention of complying with Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty ([NPT](#)), which requires them to pursue nuclear disarmament.

There are substantial reasons for India not to sign treaties that leave nuclear weapon states free to perpetuate nuclear apartheid, as is the case with the CTB and the earlier [NPT](#). But for India to continue to stand apart indefinitely would be for it to lose the opportunity to exercise leadership on an issue — a test ban and nuclear disarmament — in which it has a long track record, going back at least to the test-ban advocacy of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954.

Further, by playing only a marginal role in the most crucial political movement of our time, India risks a loss of standing in the non-aligned movement.

But if India could bring itself to put away its further nuclear ambitions, it would be uniquely well positioned to create a new dynamic by proposing creative initiatives for nuclear disarmament.



India, China, Pakistan

Any initiatives that India might propose would have far greater chances of success if offered in concert with China and Pakistan. These countries, India says, drive its nuclear program.

If India, China, and Pakistan could agree on the essentials of a global process and take some modest regional steps (such as a regional no-first-use agreement), they could make a politically powerful case on the world stage that their proposals should be taken seriously.

Another crucial advantage of such a tripartite approach is that it would be brought by a combination of declared and de facto nuclear weapon states. That divide has not been bridged by any global treaty. India's goal — if it wants to play a positive role in promoting nuclear disarmament — should be to have a process in place before the CTB review conference in 2000.

But China is not likely to act on a regional basis, because its main concerns relate to the United States and Russia, not to India. Meanwhile, Pakistan's concerns center squarely and almost exclusively on India.

However, China's general no-first-use policy regardless of a country's nuclear status could be a useful starting point for a creating regional no-first-use agreement. Further, China is the only declared nuclear weapons power to have repeatedly offered to get rid of its nuclear weapons as part of a global nuclear disarmament process. Thus, it may be more likely to act in concert with India on regional proposals made in the context of global proposals.

Meanwhile, Pakistan would stand to gain from a no-first-use agreement with India, which has a far larger nuclear arsenal, and it would surely gain from an Indian moratorium on nuclear testing.

Sequestration

If India wants to play a central role in promoting nuclear disarmament, it might propose sequestering all nuclear warheads and weapons-grade material under a phased, multilateral arrangement.

Such a plan would have the potential of bringing all eight declared and undeclared nuclear weapon states together because the warheads and weapons-grade materials would remain under national control, while verification teams composed of representatives from all eight countries monitored the storage facilities. The process would work in parallel with other arms reduction and disarmament measures under which warheads would be removed from storage for verifiable dismantlement. Sequestration of warheads might be phased in as follows:

- **Phase one.** The nuclear weapon states negotiate and accept the principle of sequestration.
- **Phase two.** The United States and Russia make complete declarations of all nuclear weapons and weapons-grade materials. (The United States already has made most of the needed declarations with respect to weapons-grade materials, but there has been no independent verification of these declarations.)
- **Phase three.** The United States and Russia begin to make large withdrawals of nuclear weapons, with all eight countries monitoring the process. Storage facilities for warheads and materials are built in the United States and Russia, as needed to facilitate verification and accounting.



Meanwhile, Britain, France, and China declare their stocks of weapons and weapons-grade material.

- **Phase four.** The other declared states begin proportional withdrawal, when remaining deployed U.S. and Russian warheads dip below a certain previously agreed level. At the same time, Israel, India, and Pakistan declare of all stocks of weapons and weapons-grade materials and begin sequestration.
- **Phase five.** All stocks of weapons-usable materials and other nuclear facilities in the commercial sector in the nuclear weapon states become subject to the same inspection procedures of the International Atomic Energy Agency currently employs in the non-nuclear weapon states.

This may sound like so much pie-in-the-sky. In fact, it is a firm, no-nonsense step on the road to nuclear disarmament. That's because the process does not require a formal commitment to nuclear disarmament over the short term, a commitment that four of the five nuclear powers are not yet ready to make. The nuclear weapon states would retain the right to withdraw warheads from storage until a global disarmament agreement was separately arrived at.

Theoretically, at least, sequestration would leave nuclear deterrence intact, although it would be politically difficult to make a decision to withdraw nuclear weapons for possible use.

Sequestration aside, actual destruction of all warheads and conversion of weapons-grade materials to non-weapons-usable forms would require a formal and permanent commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Nevertheless, sequestration would give partial reality to "no first use" of nuclear weapons and create a practical state of disarmament. For one thing, any withdrawal from storage would be highly public. Second, in times of tension, it would take weeks or possibly months before strategic warheads could be put back into their delivery vehicles and made operational. This would allow time to defuse the crisis.

In the last few years sequestration has come to have widespread support around the world. The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, for instance, and a broad array of nuclear abolition organizations describe it as an essential early step toward nuclear disarmament.

Such broad support might insure that an Indian initiative on sequestration would resonate in the news media and with enough organizations in the nuclear weapon states to make a difference. This would be particularly true of the United States, where the climate is becoming more receptive to nuclear disarmament, but where official resistance to the idea continues to be high.

Support for nuclear arms reductions is also high in Russia, but support for nuclear disarmament is more uncertain. With the disintegration of Russia's conventional military capability, many Russians have come to believe that nuclear weapons are the best deterrent to U.S. power, notably in relation to the proposed expansion of NATO.

Sequestration of warheads might be a compromise that would be more acceptable in Russia in the short term than an unequivocal commitment to total nuclear disarmament.

Yes to disarmament; no to nuclear apartheid



India cannot credibly exercise global leadership on disarmament without making some commitments to China, Pakistan, the other nuclear weapon states and, indeed, the world. These commitments need not compromise the pressure that the Indian government seems determined to put on the nuclear weapon states to disarm, but they will require the freezing of further nuclear weapons development. In addition to proposing sequestration, a reasonable set of steps for India would be to:

- Declare a moratorium on nuclear testing while the other nuclear weapons powers consider its sequestration proposal.
- Commit to ratification of the CTB if the proposal is accepted by all eight nuclear weapon states.
- Propose a no-first-use agreement with China and Pakistan.

The modern Indian state was born 50 years ago this year in an independence movement that showed the world the moral possibilities of non-violent resistance and the struggle for truth. India has an historic opportunity to help spark a new struggle. Will it choose to do so. Or will it stress its own right to follow the nuclear weapon states even farther down a dead-end nuclear road?

India was right to state its case about the CTB, a deeply flawed treaty. But a country cannot lead by always saying “no.” It is time for India to say “yes” to something, and to offer a positive plan that will promote the goal of nuclear disarmament.

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