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# Trends. Nuclear Weapons Policy in India: Admitting, Denying, or Deflecting the Truth

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The new government in India led by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has Issued a national agenda for governance. The agenda seems to suggest that for the first time India will be formally admitting to having nuclear weapons as opposed to the technology and other assets for developing them. This suggestion has been further qualified by another government announcement that the option to have nuclear weapons will be left open. Given the possible repercussions for an arms race with Pakistan, for strategic concerns of other declared nuclear powers, and for global concerns concerning nuclear proliferation--and given the informed opinion of most proliferation observers that India has already developed nuclear weapons-- one might wonder whether it is in India's interest to admit, deny, or deflect the truth.

Purely from a philosophical point of view one might conclude that all observations are based somewhat on a priori assumptions that are stated as certainties. Thus there is no objective truth and perhaps no differential consequence among admitting, denying, and deflecting the truth. However, knowledge of events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki might well render this view point sheer sophistry.

Some social psychologists have supported the hypothesis that individuals have more difficulty making inferences based on suppositions than on so-called factual premises. In this context, deflecting the truth as communication technique usually generates suppositions rather than factual premises and, thus, more difficulty in developing inferences. This difficulty might well be correlated with the recipient of deflection of truth communications having to hedge bets. Hedging bets might serve a deterrent function towards adversaries. Yet, a majority of political analysts of nuclear weapons probably would maintain that admitting the truth and generating factual premises were the linchpins of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War.

Other social psychologists have supported the hypothesis that denying the truth of what already is known through attempting to keep the truth secret can actually increase cognitive accessibility of the truth among the deniers and those closely monitoring the deniers. If accurate, this hypothesis might imply that the choice among admitting, denying, and deflecting the truth is moot.

Still other social psychologists have supported the hypothesis that repeated exposure to information enhances its rated truth--regardless of whether that information is true or false. Moreover, repeated truthful information is judged more credible than novel true information, while the relationship between repeated and novel false information is dependent on the time the comparison is made and feedback is given. As well, both actual and perceived repetition influenced the rated truth for true information, while only perceived repetition influenced false information. Thus, repetition--regardless of whether one is admitting, denying or deflecting the truth--may be a crucial component of the effects of one's communication about nuclear weapons capability.

Just based on the above research, psychological guidance for Indian public affairs officers itself seems ambiguous. Following another alleged nuclear power--Israel--even the most nationalist of Indian leaders might do well to go with deflecting the truth. (See Brown, A.S., & Nix, L.A. (1996). Turning lies into truth:

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Referential validation of falsehoods. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 22, 1088-1100; Burns, J.F. (March 19, 1998). Hindu party is candid on nuclear arms but not much else. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Byrne, R.M.J., Handley, S.J., & Johnson-Laird, P.N. (1995). Reasoning from suppositions. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Experimental Psychology*, 48A, 915-944; Lane, J.D., & Wegner, D.M. (1995). The cognitive consequences of secrecy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 237-253; Montag, N. (1996). Mentira or verdade? *Revista Brasileira de Psicanalise*, 30, 323-328.) (Keywords: Deflection, India, Nuclear Weapons, Political Psychology, Truth.)