

5-15-1998

Trends. Nuclear Tests in India: Is the Buddha Smiling?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), and the [Other Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1998) "Trends. Nuclear Tests in India: Is the Buddha Smiling?," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 4 : Iss. 19 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol4/iss19/4>

This Trends is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Title: Trends. Nuclear Tests in India: Is the Buddha Smiling?

Author: Editor

Volume: 4

Issue: 19

Date: 1998-05-15

Keywords: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, CTBT, Deterrence, India, Intelligence, Intelligence Failures, Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Testing, Security

The Indian Government's five underground nuclear tests conducted on May 11th and 13th have provoked a storm of concerns almost unanimously prognosticating heightened threats of nuclear war. These concerns may be unwarranted.

First of all, news of India's possession of nuclear weapons capabilities is not new. It now only becomes less ambiguous--regarding likely development of warhead varieties and corresponding delivery systems. And in principle, less ambiguity on nuclear matters has been touted as strengthening security matters--for example in various "open skies" initiatives through the years of the nuclear era.

Second, India's tests of fission, low-yield, and thermonuclear devices should not have been a surprising development with the coming to power of a Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government in March of this year. Elements of the coalition made pledges suggesting that government policy would change to reflect the open possession of nuclear capabilities. Testing would certainly be one way of doing this. Moreover, India's atomic weapons commissioner had made comments suggesting testing was likely--comments supported by activity around the Pokharan testing range that allegedly had been occurring for months. In addition, recent missile tests by the Pakistani government were likely seen as an escalatory provocation by the Indian government. Surprise is often feared in managing a world with nuclear weapons. There plainly should have been no surprise here.

Third, India has not violated the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty--a violation being grounds for significant security concerns--for India has never signed it. India had seemed to comply with an informal moratorium on nuclear testing since the 1996 signing of the treaty by 149 countries and, in fact, may not have engaged in a nuclear testing since 1974. And apparently India had been successfully coerced by the Clinton administration into not engaging in a nuclear test in December 1995. So, an equally significant issue would be not that India has engaged in testing now, but that it hasn't more often in the past. Again, there has been no treaty violation.

Fourth, at least during the Cold War, an escalating nuclear arms race was judged by many nuclear policy experts as contributing to security--as constituting and reinforcing deterrence. The rationale was that the consequences of nuclear war becoming ever more noxious contributed to deterrence. So why should the potential consequences of a nuclear arms race and potential redeployment of nuclear and other military assets among India, Pakistan, and even China be necessarily malign? It be reasonably posited that a new balance of terror with deterrent features is being established, even in some way reinforcing the continuing deterrent processes amongst the other declared nuclear powers: the United States (US), Russia, France, United Kingdom (UK), and China.

Fifth, one of India's rationales for not complying with test bans and test ban treaties is that it refuses to be relegated to a second-tier security status behind the declared nuclear powers--one of which is a former colonial power (UK) and one of which is a contemporary political and military competitor (China)--and in confronting political and military competition from a country that at least some Indian

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

political and religious (and their followers) consider still part of India, viz., Pakistan. Independent Indian governments have long possessed a burning desire to be a world power. India's recent governments have professed--sincerely or not--to be willing to refrain from testing and even to agree to disarm once the declared nuclear powers and other national governments known to possess nuclear weapons--viz., Pakistan, Israel--show the sincere intent of disarming and refraining from even computer simulated tests. This intent is not there. The Indian tests may be considered a push towards the other nuclear powers to truly support a nuclear-free world.

Sixth, some analysts advert to the notion that India's testing is a mortal blow to international nonproliferation policies. Yet there is a curious lack of outrage towards China's nonproliferation violations concerning Pakistan and Iran and the nonproliferation violations of North Korea and several Western countries--e.g., Germany--and a Western wannabe--viz., Russia--concerning Iraq and Iran. India's tests do not constitute an egregious nonproliferation violation.

One might conclude--especially from points four, five, and six--that concerns about India's nuclear testing reflect more of an ethnocentric bias against it, a hypocritical sense of entitlement on the part of other nuclear powers, and envy among non-nuclear powers. (The first two points seem to characterize US Senator John Glenn's [D-Ohio] remarks that the tests were "a blatant slap in the face to the way the rest of the world is going." All three points seem to characterize comments of the director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, John Holum, that nuclear weapons development should be proscribed for poor countries because this development takes away from resources that could best be used for economic development. Are the economic problems of the US nonexistent so that Holum's comments do not apply to it?) One might also conclude that there seems to be a primitive analytic stance towards nuclear assets--globally, regionally, and locally--that less is always good (bringing more security) and more always bad (bringing less security). And one might conclude that as "the Buddha is smiling" has been cited as the code message transmitted to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after India's 1974 nuclear test, the Buddha may actually be smiling on Monday's and Wednesday's tests as contributing to international security not detracting from it.

(This seems to be the case unless the US and some of its allies succeed in radicalizing and/or destabilizing India through economic sanctions and political isolation--as if economic and political problems have not heightened the proliferation threat from within Russia. [This last point along with business greed and political hypocrisy is keeping a majority of US allies from instituting significant sanctions of their own. Will one or more of these allies emulate the US of the Cold War by selling wheat or some other valuable commodity to India at bargain prices?])

Should there be significant concerns about the Indian tests? Yes, four especially. First, the role of psychodynamics and psychological needs--conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational--in impelling political and military behavior is still alive and well. For example, what to make of the Pakistani medium range ballistic missile, the Ghauri, named after a Muslim warrior that defeated a 12th century Hindu emperor, Prithvi--which also happens to be the name of an advanced Indian missile? What to make of President Clinton's comments that India may have been motivated by a lack of self-esteem because it believes it is underappreciated as a world power? And what to make of a quote of a leading Hindu nationalist who is the most powerful politician in Bombay, Balasaheb Thackeray: "We have to prove that we are not eunuchs."

Second, a regimen of safeguards similar to that among the declared nuclear powers--especially the US and the former Soviet Union--needs to be instituted to decrease the probability of political conflict

becoming nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. This need is underlined by the facts that Indian and Pakistan--unlike the US and the former Soviet Union--are geographically adjacent neighbors with a shared history of ethnic conflict and hatred. (This concern does not necessarily contradict the overall observation that the Buddha may be smiling and international security may be reinforced by the Indian nuclear tests.)

Third, there needs to be a basic rethinking of the alleged deterrent consequences of massive retaliation, mutually assured destruction, parity, and other Strangelovean faith systems to thinking the unthinkable. And as to unthinking the unthinkable, is global disarmament functionally possible? Theoretically ideal?

Fourth, if journalistic accounts are to be believed, there has been a huge shortfall among many Western intelligence entities towards predicting India's nuclear tests. This shortfall may comprise the placement of photoreconnaissance and telecommunications intercept satellites, accuracy and speed of technical data interpretation by technical and human means, interpretation of all-source data by intelligence analysts, interpretation of classified and open source data by diplomats and policy makers, and the efficiency and priorities of intelligence and policymaking systems.

Instead of instituting severe economic sanctions against India through rigidly complying with the 1994 Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act and encouraging its political isolation--acts that are based on the assumption that destabilizing a nuclear power enhances security--the US and its allies should be fixing what went wrong with intelligence and policymaking personnel, means, and systems. One may argue about the security consequences of India's testing--including global sequelae. About the security consequences of intelligence shortfalls in nuclear matters, there can be little argument. (See Axelrod, L.J., & Newton, J.W. (1991). Preventing nuclear war: beliefs and attitudes as predictors of disarmist and deterrentist behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 21, 29-40; Bennet, J. (May 14, 1998). Clinton, citing India's 'mistake,' imposes sanctions. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Burns, J.F. (May 12, 1998). India carries out nuclear tests in defiance of international treaty. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Burns, J.F. (May 13, 1998). India glows with pride as outrage rises abroad. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Howe, E.S., & Loftus, T.C. (1996). Integration of certainty, severity, and celerity information in judged deterrence value: Further evidence and methodological equivalence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 26, 226-242; Masserman, J.H. (1983). On nuclear unconscious. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 11, 325-330; Myers, S.L. (May 13, 1998). U.S. intelligence under fire in wake of India's nuclear tests. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Plous, S. (1985). Psychological and strategic barriers in present attempts at nuclear disarmament: A new proposal. *Political Psychology*, 6, 109-133; Tetlock, P.E., McGuire, C.B., & Mitchell, G. (1991). Psychological perspectives on nuclear deterrence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 42, 239-276; Weiner, T. (May 12, 1998). India's nuclear tests could provoke U.S. sanctions, officials say. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Weiner, T. (May 13, 1998). Clinton to impose sanctions on India in aftermath of nuclear tests. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, CTBT, Deterrence, India, Intelligence, Intelligence Failures, Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Testing, Security.)