

ORAL HISTORY

From Nuclear Apartheid to Nuclear Deal: The First Steps

K. Raghunath

K. Raghunath, former Foreign Secretary, recalls the background and aftermath of the May 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India, which represented a crucial step forward in the development of India's national security and foreign policy. The narration includes a recapitulation of international reactions and how the large adverse element was managed, as well as the dialogue with different countries. He also reflects on the significance of the tests, as seen against the larger canvas of India's nuclear history, including the events of the subsequent decade, culminating in the Indo-US civil nuclear deal.

Indian Foreign Affairs Journal (IFAJ): Thank you for speaking to the *Journal* on this very important subject. We look forward to hearing your reminiscences of the dramatic events of May 1998, i.e., the background and aftermath of the nuclear weapon tests, your recollection of the climate of international opinion following the tests, and how the Government of India negotiated and managed the unhelpful reactions of many countries, which included stringent economic and technology denial sanctions. It would also be of interest to see the nuclear tests in retrospect, in the light of the developments over the years since May 1998, particularly the nuclear deal with the USA.

K. Raghunath (KR): I am happy to take part in this "Oral History" exercise in the framework you have set out. The title of this project is appropriate, encapsulating as it does the steady progress that our nation has made over the decade and more that has passed since the tests, in safeguarding our interests in security, technology and other related areas. This process, in which the high point was the nuclear deal with USA in 2008, has opened up access to civil nuclear technology, materials and know-how, while also ensuring the autonomy of the defence component. While most of the action in regard to this major development took place in the latter part of the decade, the first steps taken in May 1998, mentioned in the title, however basic, were vitally important. They prepared the ground for the political, diplomatic and scientific and technological activity of the succeeding years, directed towards the steady development of our credible minimal deterrent, as well as access to the wherewithal for peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

IFAJ: Our Oral History project is based on the belief that an in-depth study of recent history helps us understand the progression of events and also provides valuable policy guidelines. How would you apply this idea to the May 1998 nuclear tests?

KR: The relevance of this exercise derives from the continuity of these developments. The questions and issues that confronted us in May 1998 – and earlier – are still with us, in a new form and milieu. Revisiting them is essential for helping us understand our own thought processes and the rationale for specific decisions and negotiating positions. All this clarifies and fortifies the mind and prepares us for facing present and future challenges – not merely in avoiding past mistakes, but also in revitalising our approach.

Please keep in mind that this subject has been analysed and commented on extensively by nuclear and defence strategists, scientists, energy experts and competent journalists, and there is hardly any new insight or information one can add. This narrative might, however, be useful in supplementing the existing literature – for example, through the recapitulation of the international reactions to our nuclear policy and our government's efforts in handling them and securing a better understanding of India's legitimate interests in security, economic development and energy.

IFAJ: Could you briefly recount the background and rationale of the May 1998 nuclear tests?

KR: The significance of May 1998 can obviously be understood only by locating it in the larger framework of our nuclear history and nuclear policy. This is an open book, marked by continuity and integrity. The May 1998 tests were the product of a long evolution. The transition from non-nuclear to nuclear weapon state status was seamless.

It would be useful to summarise this story because it is at the core of our discourse with the international community before and after May 1998. The unifying theme of India's nuclear history is our utmost, persevering effort, over half a century, to build credible national defence without recourse to nuclear weapons, and to fully develop the atom's potential for peaceful uses, especially energy. This policy was rooted in our tradition and ethos, reinforced by Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The prevailing national sentiment in independent India was disapproval of nuclear weapons.

Global nuclear disarmament is a natural corollary of non-nuclear defence and the atom for peace. This was an obvious ethical imperative. There was also a compelling pragmatic rationale; i.e. it is difficult to sustain national defence while abjuring nuclear weapons, in the midst of a global and regional nuclear build-up, unless one has foolproof security assurances, through alliance membership and a security umbrella or other guarantees from the nuclear weapon states. Besides, the insecurity caused by nuclear weapons anywhere can be removed only by dismantling nuclear weapons everywhere. “Security is indivisible” is an incontrovertible, essential guideline to survival.

Accordingly, India participated actively in the world-wide call on the nuclear powers to progressively scale down their nuclear armaments, leading to their early abolition. We played a leading role in the Non-Aligned fraternity’s campaigns for the conclusion of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). We also fully supported the Non-Aligned call on the US and USSR to take the lead in signing a Partial Test Ban Treaty – its conclusion in 1963 showed that meaningful steps towards global nuclear disarmament are indeed possible. One should remember in particular that India was one of the initiators of the cooperative international effort to set up an effective instrumentality for ensuring nuclear non-proliferation, and participated actively in the multilateral negotiations for a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Thus we persevered with the broad-based campaign for global nuclear disarmament, despite the disappointing responses from the nuclear weapon states. In parallel, we also pioneered in the peaceful uses of the atom, particularly in energy.

Our vision of nuclear weapon free national defence and security suffered a setback with China’s nuclear and missile tests in 1964, 1966 and 1967. The generalised global presence of nuclear weapons was now brought much closer home to our immediate neighbourhood, creating a new and profound sense of insecurity. This was particularly so because China made it known that it was determined to develop nuclear weapon and missile programmes in a big way. In contrast to India, China’s nuclear programme was at that time almost exclusively military.

We had joined the NPT negotiations in good faith, on the clear understanding and the agreed objective that the treaty would be a key instrument to bring about global nuclear disarmament at an early date on a realistic, phased schedule. It was also understood that it would safeguard equal security for all states, and not in any way hamper transfer of technology, know-how and material for peaceful uses of the atom.

These objectives were grossly subverted: the NPT that emerged was primarily designed to set up a club of nuclear haves, who arrogated to themselves the right to continue unabated their programmes (including nuclear weapon tests) for building and refining their nuclear and missile arsenals while categorically denying equal security and the right of credible self-defence to countries exposed to a new nuclearised neighbourhood, notably India. The specification of a cut-off date for defining a nuclear weapon state based on when they last conducted a nuclear weapon test was obviously meant to sanctify and legalise the prerogatives and status of countries with nuclear weapons.

Equally unacceptable was the linked key stipulation in the NPT making access to international transfers of the essential wherewithal needed for peaceful development of nuclear energy conditional on signing the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state, as designated in the NPT. Over the years, this developed into the hardened, core element of the global nuclear apartheid regime, put in place by the NPT custodians. This has also to be viewed alongside their disregard for carrying out their own obligations under the same NPT, to effectively scale down their armaments in a time-bound schedule, leading to global nuclear disarmament. To compound this violation, over the coming years, they steadily expanded and refined their nuclear weapon and missile stockpiles to unprecedented high levels.

Whatever the rationale for this huge “vertical proliferation” – ostensibly Cold War and national power imperatives, it made a mockery of their crusade for non-proliferation.

The question whether India should induct nuclear weapons into its national defence was, of course, addressed right at the time of Independence. Prime Minister Nehru, reflecting a national sense, rejected this choice, but also clarified that he could not speak for all successor governments, as they might well face changed circumstances. Prime Minister Shastri reaffirmed this view.

After due consideration of the implications of the Chinese nuclear and missile tests for our security, taking into account the public concern and debate on this subject, the government decided that it would continue on the non-nuclear weapon path, while taking forward the programme of peaceful applications. To meet the serious security problem posed by nuclear weapons in our immediate neighbourhood, it was decided that we would in the first instance work on negotiating security assurances from the nuclear weapon states.

The negative response of these powers of the NPT spearhead, their insensitivity to our well-founded security concerns and vulnerability, and their rejection of our demarches for security guarantees was a decisive input in shaping our nuclear policy in the 1970s and beyond.

We also had to take into account the clear indication that soon after the war with India in 1971 Pakistan under the new leadership of Bhutto had initiated a covert nuclear weapon programme. It was established in due course that this programme was started as early as 1972. It was obviously intended to clinch nuclear weapon primacy over India. Taken together with China's growing nuclear weaponisation, this represented the beginning of a new phase in the nuclear weapon build-up in our immediate neighbourhood – which matured into the Sino-Pak nuclear nexus.

It is not that India then rushed into a nuclear weapon production programme – although we had the means to develop them. There was no Indian nuclear weapon under either covert or overt development at that time. No one spoke of the Indian atomic bomb in the making. What we did was to demonstrate our mastery of the technology of nuclear explosions through the peaceful nuclear explosion of 1974. This was essential to establishing our credibility.

The response of the NPT custodians of the day, i.e. condemnation and the heavy-handed application of economic and technology denial sanctions, confirmed once again that the NPT was meant not only to consolidate the monopoly of the nuclear weapon powers, but also to punish a deemed “non-nuclear weapon state” for not kowtowing to the NPT regime. These sanctions were the beginning of a stranglehold on our nuclear development, which was tightened over the years ahead. These sanctions delayed and obstructed our peaceful energy programme, undermining our economic development and hitting at the well-being of the people. Denial also acted as a spur to build our home-grown capability; this would bear fruit in due course.

While we took stock of the action needed to protect ourselves in this worsening security milieu, we did not abandon our commitment to global nuclear disarmament. India continued its activity in this area at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva and through active engagement in important events such as SSOD-I (First Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament) and SSOD-II in 1978 and 1988 respectively. The Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for Disarmament

provided a comprehensive blueprint for phased abolition of weapons of mass destruction which is specially valid today – in the light of the renewed awareness world-wide of the imperative need for global nuclear disarmament and dismantling of WMDs in general, which is now in evidence even in the nuclear weapon states.

As a backdrop, one notes that the nuclear powers while piling up their nuclear weapons and missiles had since the early 1970s concluded a series of arms control and limitation agreements, and also settled for a tacitly agreed nuclear defence strategy for preventing nuclear conflict. This effort was not to be belittled, and arguably, did deter the nuclear weapon states from using these weapons. The crucial point is that these measures fell far short of effective global nuclear disarmament. Even more important, they were accompanied by categorical reaffirmation of the centrality of nuclear weapons in their national security strategy, i.e. these were not meant to be measures for disarmament. To fast-forward to the 1990s and beyond, expectations that the end of the Cold War would lead to a dilution of the doctrine that nuclear weapons are essential as an instrument of national power were belied. The US has been the most articulate in voicing this doctrine and others followed suit.

The crucial and compelling circumstances which progressively narrowed our choice on the nuclear option were, first, the China-Pakistan nuclear/missile nexus which started taking shape, from all indications, in the late 1970s and grew steadily in the 1980s, 1990s and beyond – right down to the present day. In 1980, a Pakistan military strategic writer was boasting about the acquisition of a nuclear weapon which would equalise India's conventional armaments superiority. This was one of several of Pakistan's articulations of their plans to acquire nuclear weapon capability. This reflected the prevailing mood in the Pakistan military junta. What was the source of their nuclear weapons? There is incontrovertible evidence that in the mid-1980s China transferred a ready-made nuclear device to Pakistan. There are also indications that a few years later China tested a nuclear device on behalf of Pakistan on Chinese soil. These years also saw the commencement of a long-term programme of transfer from China of missile technology, know-how, equipment and fuel for the development of ballistic missile capability in Pakistan. This was supplemented by similar items from North Korea in exchange for nuclear weapon related material from Pakistan, which helped North Korea build its nuclear weapon programme. All this is well documented in impartial studies, carried out in the first place in the USA.

The NPT custodians turned a blind eye to this blatant case of proliferation, despite their knowledge of what was going on. This could not be condoned on the ground that China was not an NPT signatory till 1992, or that for some years it was not subject to missile transfer restrictions. Indeed, the proliferation offence was compounded by the fact that it continued well beyond 1992.

Any country in India's position would have felt its security gravely threatened by these developments in its immediate neighbourhood. Two events of the 1990s brought home to us that the NPT regime was singularly indifferent to our legitimate concerns on this account and indeed obstructed our effort to take measures to protect ourselves. The first was the indefinite extension of the NPT, through blatantly coercive methods, and second, the unholy manner in which the CTBT was pushed to a conclusion, making India its principal target. It was also most instructive that just around this time, late in 1995 and early 1996, two nuclear weapon states, including China, carried out a series of nuclear tests, obviously to avail of the last opportunity to perfect their arsenals, before committing themselves to the CTBT. Indeed, leading countries which had reservations about the CTBT in the early 1990s became ardent devotees just a few years later.

India was a co-sponsor of the 1993 UN resolution launching the CTBT talks. The objectionable part was not so much their acting in their own interests, but the NPT regime's obstruction through arbitrary and coercive means of our effort to look after our security interests, which were based on an equally compelling rationale. There was no let-up either in the technology denial stranglehold. This progression of events made it clear beyond doubt that despite our best persevering effort, our policy of non-nuclear weapon based defence could no longer be sustained. This clinched our exercising the nuclear option.

In sum, the compelling rationale for our going nuclear was the unrelenting growth of a nuclear weapon/missile presence in our immediate neighbourhood – i.e. in China and by extension in Pakistan; consequent deep insecurity and vulnerability, because of our experience of troubled relations with both countries, and the absence of any security assurances, and the unhelpful international NPT regime, including its linkage with the technology denial regime.

The core significance of May 1998 is that without the nuclear tests

we would not have been able to start building the credible deterrent capability imperatively needed to guarantee our basic security and strategic autonomy. Further, as the events leading up to the India-US nuclear agreement of 2008 showed, the nuclear tests represented the first essential move to break out of the technology denial stranglehold.

IFAJ: Could you recall the developments that followed the tests? What was the mood in the government following the tests?

KR: On 11 May 1998, a meeting was called at the Prime Minister's House around 5.00 p.m., attended by leading ministers and senior officials (Home Minister, Defence Minister, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister/National Security Adviser and others were present). Apart from reviewing the events of the day, the most important task was to formulate a basic paper setting out the benchmarks of our policy. This paper consisted essentially of four policy decisions and commitments:

- No-first-use (NFU) (I recall that non-use against non-nuclear weapon states was added later in our security doctrine);
- No signing of CTBT, but a moratorium on testing;
- Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) – we were prepared for a multilateral treaty, which could be concluded through negotiations for this purpose in which we were ready to participate, but no commitment on stopping production of fissile material; and
- Reaffirmation of our well-established foolproof export control regime.

This template was for both internal clarification and guidance as well as for communication and public relations, and in particular for confidence building. *Inter alia*, the idea was to convey that we were taking care of our security needs as a responsible nuclear weapon state and were ready to meet the concerns related to proliferation expressed by some of our interlocutors. In retrospect, this four-point formulation struck the right balance. It did not compromise on our essential security and related interests, and at the same time created a climate of assurance and confidence, maintaining continuity and credibility in discussions with our dialogue partners. The basic message being conveyed was that we were exercising a sovereign right in compelling circumstances, in good faith and as a transparent democracy. As a non-signatory of the NPT, it was not found appropriate or necessary for us to mention the NPT, but it was implicit that we strongly supported non- proliferation. These benchmarks set the tone for

subsequent negotiations with the USA and others.

It is most instructive to read these four points side by side, with the clarification on policy given in Parliament by the Minister for External Affairs on 05 September 2008, with reference to the then ongoing negotiations on the India-US Nuclear Deal:

... We remain committed to a voluntary unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing; we do not subscribe to any arms race including a nuclear arms race. We have always tempered our strategic autonomy with a sense of global responsibilities. We affirm our policy of no first use of nuclear weapons. India will not be the source of proliferation of sensitive technologies including enrichment and reprocessing transfers. We stand for strengthening of the non-proliferation regime.

Could there be a clearer expression and demonstration of the consistency, continuity and transparency in our nuclear policy, than the close correspondence between these two statements made ten years apart from each other, by the respective governments of the day?

On 11 May 1998, just before our meeting ended, the Prime Minister met the large media group gathered at his residence and made a very brief factual announcement, i.e., that three underground nuclear tests had been conducted successfully (fission, low-yield and thermonuclear) and measured yields were as expected. There was no atmospheric radioactivity. The scientists and engineers were felicitated. There were no questions and answers; this was not a press conference.

Regarding the mood in government: Naturally, it was in the first place one of satisfaction and happiness at the successful conduct of the tests. At the same time, it was sober rather than triumphalist or unduly celebratory. There was awareness that we were entering very new terrain. Much hard work lay ahead to build on the tests. We would face a barrage of unhelpful reactions, even hostility. There was confidence that this could be taken on. The public also reflected this overall mood.

I recall Defence Minister Mr. George Fernandes saying on that occasion that he had always opposed nuclear weapons and even the 1974 PNE, but today he realised that the country had no choice but to go in for development of nuclear weapons and he was happy that a decision had finally been made.

I cite this as one prominent example of the sentiment in India about our going nuclear. In the days and weeks following, there was some expression of dissent. This was honest opinion. I am glad our democracy permitted the airing of these opinions. This also underlined the complexity of these issues.

Let us also not forget the second round of testing on 13 May, which was vital from the substantive point of view. The international community was of course expecting the second round, but would not have known the precise date and time. Expectedly, it led to another round of ire and disapproval – in some cases, a feeling of insult added to injury.

From 11 May onwards, a core group of Ministers and senior officials met almost daily till the end of the month for internal briefings, monitoring, identifying action points, etc. (These meetings continued with longer intervals in the months that followed.) Among the many important and pressing issues taken up early in these meetings was the likely effect of sanctions. At the first meeting on the subject called by the Finance Minister on the day after the second round of tests, the consensus unsurprisingly was that any damage done by the sanctions would be in direct proportion to weaknesses in the economy, and, therefore we must rectify these as best as possible, and that belt-tightening was also required. I will refer in more detail to the sanctions in a short while.

IFAJ: Could you please tell us about the immediate international reactions and how they were dealt with? We would also be interested in your comment on the Pakistani tests that followed ours.

KR: Proceeding chronologically, I remember that soon after getting home around midnight on 11 May, I received a phone call from Tom Pickering, Under Secretary for Political Affairs in the US State Department – my counterpart. We had met in September 1997 and April 1998 for the first two rounds of the revived strategic dialogue set up in the second Clinton Administration starting in January 1997. He said that President Clinton was at that moment on USAF-One (Presidential Aircraft). The President had asked him to convey to the Indian Government that the US totally disapproved of our action and that the Administration was going to immediately apply all the sanctions applicable under US law. The President also wanted him to convey that India should sign the NPT and CTBT immediately.

In response, besides telling him that this message would be transmitted to our leadership, I reminded him that they were fully aware of our position on the NPT and CTBT and the background to the tests. I do not recall the precise time when President Clinton announced the sanctions: probably it was at the White House the same evening. I recall a quote attributed to some US spokesman that they were going to “come down like a ton of bricks on India”. The sanctions actually became effective a little more than a month later because of the inter-departmental procedures and consultations required. The next morning, the US Ambassador was the first foreign envoy to call at our Ministry. While reiterating the US Government’s complete disapproval and opposition to the test, he was concerned mainly with providing a factual rundown on proposed US government action. His manner was civil but the content rigorous – a feature of all subsequent US communications with us. More on our interactions with the US later in this narration.

Regarding Pakistan, a leading and topical question on everybody’s mind was whether and when they would conduct nuclear tests. While alternative scenarios for Pakistan’s likely behaviour were set out and examined in our discussions, the gut feeling was that Pakistan would test sooner rather than later. One heard that immediately after our tests, the US began hectic carrot-and-stick lobbying with Pakistan – over assurances of handsome rewards for not testing, combined with threats of dire consequences if they did. We understand that the Pakistan Prime Minister Sharif, Army Chief Karamat, and Foreign Minister Gauhar Ayub were among the main Pakistani personages contacted. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was the US pointman and has written about this operation. The Pakistani argument, we hear, was that India’s tests clearly represented a greatly enhanced security threat to Pakistan and the Pakistan Government had no choice but to take effective countermeasures to protect their interests. The people of Pakistan would never forgive them if they did not respond. In principle, Pakistan could have bought US inducements for not testing, i.e. substantial rewards in the form of aid, possibly large outright grants. One recalls a recent news report that US\$5 billion was offered. They could also have the benefit of the moral high ground. However, one knew all too well that Pakistan was driven by a completely different dynamic, which categorically indicated carrying out tests.

An unfortunate consequence in public relations and perception of the chronology of the India-Pakistan tests was the diehard impression that India went nuclear first and Pakistan responded by conducting their

test. This has become a recurrent cliché in the discourse on the nuclear tests. We found it necessary to correct this facile and absurd impression right at the start of our dialogue. It misses the whole point, that it was India which had reacted to the nuclear weapon and missile build-up in our immediate neighbourhood – in the first instance in China and then through the China-Pakistan nuclear-missile nexus in Pakistan. Pakistan is essentially “a nuclear extension” of China, to cite one of our leading strategic experts. In fact, this is the central rationale of our going nuclear. The catchphrase “India tested first and Pakistan followed” trivialises the whole issue. This is part of a stereotype putting India and Pakistan in a convenient box. It is imperative that these facts are repeatedly emphasised in our exposition of our nuclear policy. The sequential chain from 1945 is: US → USSR → UK/France → China/Pakistan → India.

IFAJ: What further developments were there in the international community’s reactions? Could you give us an analytical view?

KR: The international community’s reactions comprised, at one end of the spectrum, the response of a very small number of countries who were either silent or expressed understanding (qualified with a reiteration of their own commitment to disarmament). The response of the numerical majority – e.g., the large number of countries who are members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – was typically in the form of very brief official public statements indicating disapproval, with two or three explanatory sentences added – essentially to say that the tests undermined disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, in many cases specifically mentioning NPT, and were destabilising. While the content was critical, the tenor in most of these statements was matter of fact rather than strident.

At the other end of the spectrum were several countries where reactions went well beyond simple disapproval and were condemnatory, judgemental and even harsh. Their essential content was emphasis on the sacrosanct nature of the NPT regime as well as the CTBT and similar instrumentalities and their resolve to safeguard these regimes. The activists among the strong critics were the leading NPT powers – above all the US, China, Japan, many European countries – notably the Scandinavians, Eastern Europe, and some of the smaller new EU members. Another special category of strong critics comprised a number of countries with known capability for producing nuclear weapons but who had abstained from or renounced the option – most notably South Africa, as well as

Canada, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, and Sweden. Repeating the standard menu of criticism, their disapproval also focused on an admonition, asking why India could not desist from going nuclear just as they had despite capabilities to do so. Members of nuclear weapon free zones, especially in Latin America or the South Pacific, were also among the critics. Central Asia with its own *de facto* nuclear weapon free zone was at the milder end of the spectrum. One recalls CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia) in this connection, as yet in a formative stage. Kazakhstan, the base for CICA, had a special position with regard to nuclear weapon tests, as it had voluntarily dismantled its substantial weapon stockpile after 1991.

A distinctive segment of the international reaction was that from collectivities and groups – regional and others. Again, the baseline was criticism and disapproval, along with brief expositions of the reasons, usually on the same lines as in the national responses of the members of these groupings. In the case of the NAM and ASEAN collectivities, one got the sense that the member countries' main concern was to make sure that their national positions were further clarified in the group statement, so that they would not be accused of being out of line with a global consensus, especially on the NPT. The collectivities and groupings which were particularly condemnatory and judgemental were the P-5, N-5, G-8, EU, and the special category of “nuclear abstainers” mentioned above (South Africa, etc.). In most of these cases, member countries of groupings seemed keen to ensure that their harsh national positions were reasserted in the group resolutions. Friendly and helpful countries, such as Russia, France and Germany, which had promised to do whatever they could to moderate hostile resolutions adopted by the P-5, N-5, G-8, EU and others, could not really influence the outcome, either because they did not really put their heart into opposing group decisions in these fora or, more likely, because the collective dynamic did not permit effective intervention.

The condemnatory and judgemental atmosphere generated by the individual as well as collective responses, particularly of US, UK, Japan and other NPT custodians mentioned above, was reinforced by the imposition of sanctions, economic and technology oriented, and related measures such as blocking funding support for projects from the World Bank, IMF, ADB and other multilateral bodies. While the US led in applying sanctions, which were also the most comprehensive, there were a number of other countries who

followed suit, either on their own steam or with inspiration from the US. We understand that the US Administration worked hard to persuade as many other countries and international organisations as possible, to join in the condemnation. This was consistent with its own hard response and, presumably, a policy requirement.

The overall international mood and climate provoked by the tests was certainly unpleasant, and also posed specific diplomatic and other challenges to us. However, it is equally important to note that the global reaction was not one-dimensional or without nuances and significant qualifiers. An analysis of the motivation and dynamic of the responses across the board suggests the following elements:

- Genuine belief in the NPT and its categorical value especially in the Western world (along with Japan and some other countries) in helping to create a safer world. This involved not merely a moralistic and “theological” stand on nuclear matters, but a more specific apprehension that nuclear tests in a particular region could set off a proliferation chain reaction in a troubled neighbourhood. The visceral fear was about West Asia. Unlike regions such as Latin America, Central Asia and South East Asia where nuclear weapon free zones had been formalised, West Asia was unregulated, with Israel’s covert nuclear weapon capability adding an additional complicating factor. Given the proximity of India and Pakistan to the region, there was a natural inclination to see the tests by these two countries as the most probable trigger of proliferation in West Asia. India was not faulted as a direct source, but was seen as having opened Pandora’s box, hence a target of blame. In the decades since, the focus has shifted to the region per se, away from India. Indeed, Pakistan with its dubious record has come to be seen in a more critical light than hitherto as a source of proliferation.
- Political compulsions and obligations to domestic constituencies (e.g., electoral) and to allies abroad to demonstrate loyalty to the NPT regime. This applied in particular to custodians of the NPT.
- An undeniable psychological dimension – the satisfaction of being able to wield the stick over a vulnerable country.

Having noted the negatives, one could also see that there was a pragmatic desire to talk to India, if for no other reason than to limit damage and bring us closer to the fold, through persuasion rather than denunciation and eventually find a *modus vivendi*. This thinking would also have been prompted by an

interest in preventing bilateral relations from being unduly destabilised – one could presume a long-term calculation regarding the benefits they could look forward to, if some compromise accommodating India was finally established, opening access to nuclear commerce and trade in technology related to the nuclear industry. In the last analysis, one can also surmise recognition that they were dealing with a responsible, reasonable country, working in transparency and good faith within a democratic set-up, apart from our large economy and economic potential and the prospect of global power status. It is not surprising that with this background, even the harshest among our critics, including China, moved, over the months, to a dialogue mode, responding to our own interest in restoring normal communication, and in some cases even on their own initiative. This was reflected in due course in political attitudes and official dealings with us. This was also influenced by the inability of friendly countries to help soften the strong resolutions of P-5, N-5, G-8, EU, etc. and not detract from indications of their wanting to help reach a *modus vivendi*.

The countries helpful to us indicated an understanding, that even as they upheld the NPT's sanctity, their criticism of India was, strictly speaking, not directed at violation of the treaty because a non-signatory could not be accused of such an act. They tacitly accepted India's sovereign right to test, but equally claimed the right to criticise the tests on the ground that they undermined non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament, and regional and global stability. This nuance was not unhelpful to us and strengthened the atmosphere for dialogue.

All this is relevant as a corrective to the impression that the whole world was against us. It is, of course, true that not belonging to a pre-committed bloc, we had to go it alone, and use our own wits to secure international understanding and acceptance, but we were helped by the few favourable circumstances and undercurrents in the behaviour of the international community which I have noted. It is paradoxical but true that it was the nuclear tests that were the catalyst enabling us to make use of these positive factors, eventually putting in place security/strategic dialogues which helped strengthen our strategic autonomy and technology access, which could not materialise as long as we were in the nuclear restraint and open nuclear option mode.

Before going into further details on global reactions, let me recall three key elements in our message to the international community:

1. We did not go nuclear in a spirit of triumph; we took the step because we were left with no option. This rationale was unassailable; therefore, we did not need to “explain”.
2. Contrary to the motive some of our critics were quick to ascribe to us, the tests were prompted not by any quest for national prestige; the overriding, compelling consideration was national security.
3. Our action also rested, in the last analysis, on a sovereign national right – exercised in good faith and in a democratic set-up.

(The sovereign right idea would also apply to future exigencies, e.g. in the context of the public debate on the nuclear test conditionality implicit in the nuclear deal with the US. There is no other guideline to handling this issue.)

Our government was prepared for the largely adverse reaction. Much of it was prefigured in our interactions with leading NPT-spearhead countries in the two or three years leading up to May 1998, when we had regular calls by their representatives bringing us a “don’t do it” message. Further, specific measures likely to be taken by leading countries such as the US in the event of nuclear tests, particularly sanctions – e.g., the US NNPA 1978, the Glenn Amendment, etc. – were in the public domain. We were already subject to a far-reaching and expanding sanctions regime applied over the years since Pokhran-I (1974) and it was to be expected that this would be reinforced with focus on dual-use technology and project funding by multilateral agencies. Many of our arguments and briefs were carried over in updated form from the pre-May 1998 period of the open nuclear option. This helped to keep our Missions abroad and other communicators briefed promptly and regularly and thus help prepare the ground for the understanding that was gradually established.

The Ministry of External Affairs worked as a team, implementing policy and also providing professional assessments and advice. Success was due to the skill and hard work of the Joint Secretary and other supporting officials concerned and our Heads of Missions. We were also helped by the advice from our strategic community.

In this context, it may be useful to have, in some detail, the public reactions of various countries and blocs to our nuclear tests. It is also important to understand, at the same time, the undercurrents of their reactions not often seen in the public domain, and our nuanced moulding of these reactions in order to

gradually improve the atmosphere for dialogue.

United States: The US had been our leading interlocutor before May 1998, and it was their reaction that counted most. This was because the US carried with it several other leading countries, not only because of its weight but also through the sharing of a broad consensus on crucial global issues. Pre-eminent among these was non-proliferation, and specifically the NPT. There were, of course, issues on which the United States' friends were not on the US wavelength. Other countries, e.g. in NAM, had also gone along with the US-initiated NPT consensus, though with significant qualifications. In any case, the US assiduously widened and strengthened the global consensus, co-opting allies as well as others, as in the NPT Review Conference of 1995 and the CTBT.

To paraphrase my earlier statement, the space for securing international understanding was found not so much in the differing approaches or "dissent" between the US and others, but in the nuances and subtexts in the approach of each country. The US itself was a prime example of this dynamic: it was in the forefront both of criticism as well as dialogue for reaching a *modus vivendi*. We also had to work on a similar exercise with a number of other countries; nobody in the international community could be ignored.

Let me summarise the lead up to and the parameters of our dialogue with the US. Harsh reactions notwithstanding, we were not "kicking anyone in the teeth" and therefore had no problem in reaching out for a dialogue. The first personal contact was made in the second week of June 1998 by Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Shri Jaswant Singh, who visited Washington DC after participating in a narcotics-related UN conference in New York. It was agreed that a regular dialogue would be started early. The dialogue cycle began at Frankfurt in June 1998, with successive rounds mainly in Delhi and Washington, and a few other places such as Rome and London.

The basic US approach could be reconstructed as follows:

- (a) In the first place, set up a rigorous frame of reference of normative principles reaffirming maximal positions, a kind of Ten Commandments, i.e., no country can acquire nuclear weapon capability beyond the traditional N-5. Accordingly, the following conditions would be enforced: Total adherence to NPT; "cap, roll back and eliminate" any embryonic capability; no nuclear tests permitted – therefore sign the CTBT. By the same logic, cease fissile material production and submit to the FMCT regime whenever it is ready. Foolproof export control commitment, as part

of a supervised international regime (with punitive provision). Sanctions would not be relaxed.

b) While upholding this normative peremptory frame of reference, it was not brought upfront in the dialogue. To explore the possibilities of mutual accommodation, the following more lenient template was offered:

1. No insistence on NPT, and it would not be discussed – though it retained undiminished sanctity, and US policy and actions would continue to be in an NPT framework.
2. A minimal nuclear-missile defence and deterrent capability was acceptable, i.e. there would be no “cap, roll back and elimination”. It was understood, however, that development of our deterrent capability would be based on “strategic restraint” under a regime to be broadly agreed on – and ideally, quantified. Monitoring was implicit.
3. It was presumed that developing minimal capability would not require further nuclear testing. Hence India should be able to sign the CTBT at the earliest, consulting our public opinion etc. as required.
4. On the same basis, India should cease production of fissile material and join the FMCT regime whenever it was in place.
5. The US recognised that we had a strict and effective export control system and would not make an issue of this. There would of course be continued monitoring as part of normal international procedure.

(Sanctions, including the possibility of lifting them, would not be a subject of discussion. Implied, however, was that relaxing of sanctions might be offered as an incentive for cooperation by India on any of the above items.)

Our responses were based on the following principles:

1. Our commitment to non-proliferation was total. We were among the originators of the idea. We actively participated in working out the right instrumentality to ensure non-proliferation. The circumstances of initiating the NPT and its actual observance by member countries have made it clear that the treaty was not the right means of achieving this purpose. We would, of course, scrupulously observe the basic

principles of non-proliferation and expect that others would do the same. In this framework, concern with an export control regime was not an issue in our talks. (Implied in this was that the US should look at the export control regime of certain other countries.)

2. Regarding the deterrent: Our security interests categorically and legitimately required the establishment of a credible minimal deterrent capability. We would not compromise on this. We would continue, as above, to be restrained in developing this capability. This was not an open-ended project; we did not seek parity or an arms race. Besides, we were functioning in good faith in a transparent democratic system. All this was an inherent and integral part of our national ethos. No deterrent defence capability could provide security unless it was credible, even while we ensured that it was minimal. In the framework of strategic restraint, it should be left to us to decide what was credible. A crucial guideline was that we are operating in a constantly changing regional/global milieu and the configuration of our deterrent capability had to adapt to this idea in a dynamic manner. We were the best judges of this process. We were always mindful of international opinion, but no one from outside could prescribe the configuration or quantify or curtail it.
3. Following this principle, we could not commit to cease production of fissile material but we were ready as always to join multilateral talks leading to a treaty.
4. Regarding CTBT, the circumstances in which we were obliged to leave the negotiations were well known. We had always been ready to work for a CTBT that was taken up in the right spirit, with integrity and with due attention to equal security. The most operational point in the context of the talks was that a moratorium had been put in place which met all the requirements of the CTBT. Hence there was no compelling or convincing rationale in the insistent demand that we should accede to the CTBT in the framework and form concluded in Geneva.
5. To maintain dignity, there was no pleading for lifting of sanctions, but enough was said to make it known that we considered them most unreasonable and uncalled for.

The dialogue was professional in content and tenor. The US approach was rigour in substance and urbanity in style. We had no problem in treating the exercise as a “common cause” as the US described it, so as to find mutually acceptable results; and if this was not achieved, at least to strengthen

understanding and confidence. It would be fair to say that though in formal terms the outcome was not definitive, there was certainly forward movement in this regard.

The dialogue was interrupted for many months beyond January 1999 (in Delhi) because of our preoccupation with Kargil and its aftermath. It resumed in November 1999 – I am not aware that there were further rounds. President Clinton visited India in March 2000 and that event itself represented a kind of mutual satisfaction on the overall atmosphere, with some major inadequacies. The CTBT issue had required a disproportionately high profile, especially in public perception, partly because of its prominence and notoriety, in the mid-1990s. At the time of the dialogue, it was obvious that the CTBT was being vigorously pushed because it was a critical issue in the US Administration's political agenda – despite full knowledge of our position. Our moratorium and our conduct and good faith were important determinants. What clinched the outcome of the discussion on the CTBT was that it was, in any case, taken off the table by the US political process.

This particular background should, however, also remind us that the CTBT could be revived under a new political dispensation in the US. The FMCT, while apparently not a live negotiating issue in Geneva at this moment, could also be activated at any time. Common sense suggests that both the CTBT and FMCT processes need to be kept under constant watch and strategies worked out in advance to handle them, on the basis of our evolving security requirements.

“Strategic restraint” – vintage American terminology, but not problematic for us – was the most substantive item on the US agenda, and indeed the core US concern in the implementation of their considered decision of part accommodation of India's nuclear weapon development. CTBT, FMCT and export control are, essentially, corollary concerns. It is shorthand for how we will go above building our credible, minimal deterrent capability – i.e. configuration (quality and quantity), scope, reach and timeframe. Besides reiterating the message “Be minimal – don't overdo or destabilize”, the US effort was to get the best possible sense of our thinking on these parameters.

Our objective was to get the US side to fully register the template outlined earlier. This objective was realised to a great extent, partly because the US had already been conditioned to our “restraint” and “responsible behaviour”. Further, neither during the dialogue series (1998–1999) nor in the decade since

then was there friction with the US on this score (e.g. Agni and other programmes). However, this is not a foolproof guide to reactions in the future. The US threshold/tolerance levels have always been high, despite some lowering due to the China factor. In order to avoid possible problems, i.e. a particular action of ours being considered “destabilizing”, we need continuous contact and dialogue. In the last analysis, the sovereign national right is the correct reference point. We shall flounder if we do not hold fast to this principle.

There were some relaxations of the sanctions over this period covered by the talks – this was done in a calibrated manner in typical US style. We resisted any implied suggestion linking the lifting/relaxation of specific sanctions with our “cooperating” on particular US requirements.

There was some thinking in government to link acceptance of the Clinton visit date (March 2000) with prior lifting of sanctions, but this was found impractical. As with sanctions regimes in general (and particularly those of the US), it took months to be rid of the sanctions. Our sanctioned “entities” were freed in groups and by stages. (A thorough study is needed on the US sanctions system as a remarkable foreign policy weapon.)

There were contacts with the US besides the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott dialogue. We had regular communication with the US Congress, e.g. with the India Caucus in the House and leading Senators who had taken a keen interest on relations with India. Visits were exchanged regularly. One recalls meetings with Senator Biden (D), Sen. Lugar (R), Sen. Shelby (R), Head of the Senate Intelligence Committee Sen. Charles Robb House (D), Sen. Brownback, and Sen. Jesse Helms (R) (then Head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee). Senator Jesse Helms flayed the Clinton Administration for downplaying the NPT and giving high profile to the CTBT in the dialogue with India. (“The CTBT will be signed over my dead body.”) At the same time, he was brusque in demanding that we accede to the NPT without delay. There was good contact between the US strategic community and the US media and their counterparts in India and with our Ministry. There were also useful meetings with military personalities, notably General Ralston, a key figure of the Strategic Air Command, whom we met just after the 20 August 1998 American bombing raids on al Qaeda hideouts in Afghanistan, and on some other occasions.

In the initial days and weeks, the US media, strategic experts and Congressmen were almost unanimous and articulate in their criticism of India. The India Caucus was no exception. There were no surprises in all this.

A notable exception was Dr Henry Kissinger, who wrote a prominent and widely read article a few days after our tests arguing for a pragmatic understanding of India's compulsions. I recall his remark that we should have done our testing after the first Chinese nuclear test; we would then have avoided the current situation. Public criticism of India in these US constituencies mellowed over the months, even though the frame of reference did not change.

Neighbours: An obvious question is the reaction of our neighbours in the SAARC region. Bhutan conveyed understanding and support (while also reiterating its commitment to nuclear disarmament). There was no unilateral criticism by anybody but the SAARC countries subscribed to the NAM position articulated on different occasions. One could say that they understood the dynamics of our decision – and of Pakistan – but were also concerned about possible increase of tensions (India-Pakistan and India-China), regional destabilisation, etc. This was to be expected. Over the months there was progressive accommodation with the nuclearisation of the region. We had also communicated with them.

China: Prior to May 1998, China had been relatively low key in its public references to our nuclear posture. Obviously, this cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of our nuclear option and the possibility of its being exercised. What it does suggest is certain pragmatism. Perhaps in character with their diplomatic style, they thought it politic to let other NPT activists do the crusading, while they would strongly support the effort. It is also possible that they had formed an image of India as a “good boy”, traditionally opposed to nuclear weapons and not likely to summon up the courage to exercise the nuclear option.

This could well have been the thought prompting Chinese anger with India for having “broken its word”, as they saw it, and also because they felt we had been dissembling. This was the main point in Chinese Premier Zhu's statement soon after the tests and it was the cue for comments by others in the leadership and in the official media. The surprise and displeasure at our refusal to play the passive role assigned to us explains perhaps the high dudgeon in which their spokesmen got into – e.g. the Chinese Ambassador here, an early visitor to the Ministry immediately after 11 May, demanded testily that we should immediately send an official team to Beijing to “explain” our action.

An even more important element in the Chinese response, made clear by Chinese officials and think-tanks soon after the event, was that

They were deeply offended by our invoking the “Chinese threat” as the rationale for our action, referring in the first place to the circular letter (meant to be confidential but leaked very early in the US press) addressed by the Prime Minister to world leaders (except China) and to the Defence Minister’s statements. Their official reaction in Foreign Ministry level meetings was supplemented by a spate of repetitive, unfriendly comment in the Chinese media dwelling on this theme.

What was especially noteworthy was China leading the charge – ahead of others including the USA – in multilateral fora (P-5, N-5, CD), in working for condemnatory resolutions. The most prominent example was the P-5 “Foreign Ministers’ Committee”, an informal body meeting in Geneva (04 June 1998). In the full-fledged UN Security Council meeting on 06 June, China is known to have been the main force behind the strong language and the mention of India-Pakistan bilateral issues, specifically Kashmir.

At the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting in Manila (July 1998), China was restrained in criticism probably because they had, ever since ARF was set up, opposed its pronouncing on member countries’ actions/policies. A departure from this principle could activate criticism of Chinese actions in the South China Sea, then a major point of friction between China and ASEAN. Also recall the joint US-China statement in June 1998 during President Clinton’s visit, which again condemned the nuclear tests and spoke about the common responsibility of the US and China to keep the peace in South Asia – an echo of Nixon-Mao in 1972, and prefiguring US-China statements in subsequent years – e.g., most recently the Obama visit of 2009.

Our Foreign Ministry level official dialogue with China – a regular annual event put in place in the 1980s along with the border talks – had been deferred by us because of the unfavourable atmosphere. This was eventually held in Beijing in February 1999. Among the principal arguments we put to the Chinese was that they should have no difficulty in understanding the compelling rationale for our nuclear tests, i.e. the deteriorated security environment which they themselves had put forward as the essential justification for their going nuclear. A good example would be their own statements following their 1995 and 1996 nuclear tests, in which one could appropriately substitute the word “India” for “China”. We also reminded them of the Chinese proverb which they used to quote in the 1960s in their then strong opposition to the NPT – “The magistrate burns down the whole village while punishing the poor peasant for lighting his single lamp.”

We pointed out that their spearheading condemnation of India at P-5, N-5 and CD meetings was contrary to the spirit of reasoned dialogue which they themselves wanted. The Chinese response, interestingly, was that they had no quarrel with our exercising a sovereign right to carry out nuclear tests in order to safeguard our security interests; what hurt them was our singling out China as a security threat and the principal factor prompting us to go nuclear. At a subsequent social occasion, a senior Chinese official remarked that they understood India's desire to look after its own security, but, rather than criticise China for having attained a certain capability, India should strive to reach the same level. This suggestion may well be disingenuous but is also useful.

In the immediate aftermath of the tests we got a sense that China did not perhaps think it worthwhile to engage in a security dialogue with us, on the ground that we were not a substantial nuclear weapon state – technically speaking a non-nuclear weapon state – and a security dialogue would therefore be undermining their formal position. In due course, however, they took a more businesslike approach, and were themselves keen to put in place a strategic, security dialogue in addition to the standard Foreign Ministry and Joint Working Group exercise. The change could have been prompted by recognition that the Indian nuclear tests and its long-term programme for building nuclear/missile deterrent capability was to be taken seriously, that India had a rational and restrained nuclear posture, and a confidence-building exercise might benefit them. Some months after the February 1999 talks, we had a visit from one of their high-flier diplomats, later to become a leading Vice Minister. His brief was to initiate a security dialogue. This improved approach would not have been possible as long as we were in a “restraint mode”. There is no doubt that however strong their initial rancour, it was our nuclear tests and the adoption of the nuclear option that opened the way to at least begin establishing a more sensible equation with China.

As has been made clear in the earlier narrative, the China-Pakistan nuclear-missile connection is a crucial part of our rationale for going nuclear. There are obvious explanations of this nexus. We should, nevertheless, objectively diagnose the nature and extent of the security problem, challenge, or threat it poses for us. An essential element in any policy or action on this subject is that we must continue putting this across candidly to China upfront in our security/strategic dialogue, as it is an important concern in our bilateral relations and, in particular, one of those aspects of their policy which is greatly at variance with their

declared commitment to stable, harmonious relations with us. We presume China to be a responsible interlocutor, interested in professional assessments. Further, communication on an issue such as this would make sense only if we credibly convey our resolve and capability to protect our interests. Dialogue and confidence-building measures (CBMs) cannot work without a credible level of parity

Russia: In keeping with the tradition of a friendly and supportive attitude to issues of importance to us (taken over, with some qualification, from the Soviet era), Russia's immediate response to the tests was milder and less judgemental than that of the West. Though they were in line with the general disapproval, there was no "coming down on India like a ton of bricks", leave alone sanctions. In any case, Russian law did not seem to provide for automatic sanctions, unlike the US. President Boris Yeltsin's first response to the telephone call which our Prime Minister made the day after the tests was, "We are your friends! Why did you not tell us?" There was no discordant note.

As against this, Russia was an early signatory and a staunch NPT custodian, although not as much of a NPT crusader as the US. In line with the other P-5 and N-5, Russia, to begin with, also strongly emphasised the importance of India signing the NPT. This was the thrust of Foreign Minister Primakov's message to our National Security Adviser when the latter met him in Moscow at the end of May 1998. With this background it was not surprising that Russia was also a party to the collective criticism at P-5, N-5 and G-8 gatherings in May-June 1998. Over the months there was progressive softening of Russia's public posture. In their internal assessment, apparently, there was acceptance of the compulsions and consistency of our position. In some ways, this was in line with the underlying commonality of strategic interests that has kept India-Russia relations on even keel. This implies an understanding of India's sovereign right to test – a repetition of Russia's pragmatic understanding of our sovereign decision-making right, as on some other issues – even as Russia continued to underline the sanctity of NPT. The visit of Prime Minister Primakov to India in December 1998 confirmed this supportive mood which was also prefigured in the official dialogue of September 1998. (It was during this Delhi visit that Prime Minister Primakov proposed the India-China-Russia triangle. This indicates Russia's complex equation with China and is not unconnected with the nuclear aspect.)

With the advent of the Putin administration, a more structured approach

on nuclear issues related to India was put in place, and in line with the streamlining of their overall foreign and security policy. The essential elements were recognition of India as a responsible nuclear weapon state, and accordingly a tacit endorsement of our programme of developing a credible minimal nuclear deterrent capability, and not pressing India constantly to observe “strategic restraint”. Equally important, Russia has been forthcoming in acknowledging India’s legitimate need for large-scale peaceful nuclear energy development and in expressing Russia’s own interest in helping in this venture. While adhering to its strong NPT commitment, Russia also recognises India as a special case that requires a special effort to help find a way out of the NPT impasse. The prospect of commercial openings for Russian nuclear technology equipment, know-how, and fuel exports is a major incentive.

In the event, it was not Russia taking the first step, but our interaction with the US that helped find a way out of the NPT impasse. Prior to this, despite its principled support, Russia pleaded its inability to go beyond what it had done, i.e., Kudankulam, and promises of additional units at the same location, as well as one instalment of fuel supply. Now that the India-US deal has cleared the way, Russia is moving energetically to work toward expansion of our civil energy cooperation. The India-Russia nuclear story that has unfolded through the decade does not need to be elaborated here except to reiterate that Russia’s attitude has consistently been helpful and not overburdened with reservations. At the same time, continued effort is needed to keep our “nuclear” relations with Russia stable and dynamic.

Russia’s reactions also make it clear that because of their proximity to South Asia and West Asia (the underbelly), they are particularly sensitive to the dangers of proliferation in West Asia; as well of the India-Pakistan “flashpoint” and the WMD-terrorism linkage in Pakistan. These will continue to feature as key issues in our dialogue.

Japan: Because of Japan’s special sensitivity on nuclear issues and Japan’s strategic importance for us, it was clear that we should strive to secure their understanding and keep our relations from being unduly disturbed because of our nuclear tests. Japan’s reaction was predictably very critical, incorporating the NPT-centred agenda shared with the US and other Western countries, with a very distinctive Japanese element.

Their sanctions were announced almost at the same time as by the US; the Japanese Ambassador was among the first foreign envoys to visit the Ministry

to reiterate their policy, especially on sanctions including the suspension of official development assistance (ODA), severe curbs on investments and on multilateral funding for projects. He was at pains to stress that these measures were meant to be punitive, but that grassroots and humanitarian projects would be spared. Almost in the same vein as China, Japan also asked that an official delegation visit Tokyo immediately to “explain” (this demand was repeated several times in the succeeding weeks). In August 1998, we received another suggestion that the customary annual Hiroshima Memorial wreath-laying visit by our Ambassador in Japan should be observed as an apology/repentance event. Of course, we declined these suggestions, while also acknowledging Japan’s unique sensitivities. Japan was also in the forefront of action against India in international fora (UN Security Council, G-8, CD, ARF) – on some occasions even more avidly than China (e.g. at ARF where China was restrained – for reasons I have mentioned). Japan also linked ODA resumption with NPT/CTBT signing.

The Japanese sanctions lasted long and one presumes that, as with US sanctions, some damage was done to our projects because of suspended funding. I gather that ODA was not such an important factor. I remember the head of the Godrej firm, Mr. S.P. Godrej, telling us in late 1998 that the sanctions were hampering the export of an important machine tool from Mitsubishi – banned on the dual-use criterion, though the item did not have the remotest military relevance. Ironically, he had been decorated recently with a high honour by the Emperor of Japan. At one point, the government asked Mr. R.P. Goenka, known to have many Japanese contacts, to persuade his counterparts in Japan to moderate their government’s policy both on sanctions and the political front.

Possibly this and other similar efforts did help. What is also important is that at least two large Japanese federations, including Keidanren, sent high-level teams to India to convey that they did not support their government’s sanctions and curbs on trade and investment and were willing to help us restore normal business dealings. I recall that in these meetings they spoke with great conviction. One can only presume that this influence would have played a role in bringing home to the Japanese government the inappropriateness of the sanctions and other curbs. Over the rest of the year, we had a number of Japanese visitors, especially parliamentarians and political personalities, who projected goodwill and a keen interest in normalising relations.

In January 1999, we felt that it would be in our interest to resume the regular official dialogue deferred for many months. We had taken care to convey to the Japanese at all levels that we fully respected their distinctive and profound anti-nuclear sentiment, but also expected understanding of our position. On this basis, during this visit we provided detailed briefings to the Japanese Foreign Ministry and others (e.g., the Foreign Relations Committee in Parliament), media, businessmen and academics. We found that our interlocutors did not project any animus, and indeed seemed interested in developing a long-term strategic relationship based on common interests, especially security and stability in the region. On sanctions, what we projected was not a plea to remove them, but a message that such actions were very inappropriate and uncalled for. Despite these recommendations, my impression is that the Japanese reaction to our nuclear tests did arrest, for a while, the normal growth of the relationship, and the realisation of the potential for a significant strategic relationship.

Informally, aspects such as Japan's relatively muted reaction to China's 1995-96 tests, the crucial fact of Japan being under a nuclear umbrella, and other sensitive questions were also brought up by us. I recall a Japanese expert citing the literature on nuclear tests casting doubt on the authenticity of our tests. We gave him a suitable refutation along with a comprehensive article on the subject just published in the journal *Current Science*.

France: The French position and thinking on our nuclear tests struck one as being marked, in the first instance, by a classical, almost Gaullist respect for national sovereignty, reflecting France's strong feelings on the issue and its distinctive nationalism. At an informal meeting in January 1998 with then Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, President Chirac who was on a visit to India as Chief Guest for Republic Day, was asked what France would do if we carried out a nuclear test. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Rien" (Nothing).

Thus, France belongs to the category of countries I had referred to earlier who stressed the sanctity of NPT but also endorsed our right to actions in exercise of national sovereignty, including the nuclear tests. You would recall that post-1974, they did not join the other "sanctioners" (Canada, Australia, US, etc.) and continued nuclear cooperation, especially Fast Breeder technology, until they themselves signed the NPT. Besides acknowledging national sovereignty, they clearly expressed understanding of our position regarding technology denial.

Our dialogue before and after the nuclear tests also suggested a view similar to Russia's on India's access to the wherewithal for developing peaceful nuclear energy. In 1998, their leaders, notably President Chirac, used language very similar to that of President Putin a few years later – i.e. the NPT is important but India is a special case and a special way out must be found.

Coincidentally, the annual Foreign Ministry level dialogue with France had been fixed for 14 May 1998, the day after our second round of testing. The discussions in Delhi with my French counterpart were very cordial and substantive and reflected the mature and constructive approach of the French. I recall that we also reviewed the nuclear policy evolution of India and France – a very illuminating exercise.

Likewise, the content and tenor of the talks held in September 1998 between our visiting Prime Minister and President Chirac and other French political figures were also very positive. We did not get a sense of censure or non-comprehension in the comments from the French side. A concrete step taken immediately at President Chirac's suggestion was the institution of a formal strategic dialogue, with the NSA leading our side and a senior foreign policy/security expert on the French side. This turned out to be a successful professional exercise lasting well into the year 2000. (It has been commented that in setting up a structured security dialogue, the French were emulating the exercise underway with the US. This comment does not detract from the value of the exercise with France.) At the annual Foreign Ministry level talks in mid-1999, the nuclear tests issue did not feature – it was essentially Kargil and normal business. The evolution of our nuclear cooperation with France in the mid-2000s, in particular after the Indo-US nuclear deal, is a logical follow-up of the position they took in 1998.

Germany: Germany was also in the “helpful and friendly” category, even while affirming the sanctity of NPT and disapproval of our tests. Being a non-nuclear country, Germany was not entirely on the same wavelength as France and Russia, partly because of an ideological and principled opposition to nuclear weapons. The German Ambassador, who was well disposed to India, after reiterating their official message, remarked that they understood our position and wished all luck in the difficult job ahead of winning international understanding.

Because of their correct manner, we had agreed to an early scheduling (July 1998) of our regular Foreign Ministry talks. The German side listened patiently to our exposition and were appreciative of our detailed clarifications. For example, they accepted with good grace our detailed factual correction of their impression that our defence expenditure as a percentage of GDP was among the highest in the world, whereas it is one of the lowest; we cited in support figures from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London. The German parliamentarians, whom we met during this official visit, including the strongly anti-nuclear Greens, were also moderate in their comment, partly because their concern was directed in the first instance at the established nuclear powers for their failure to meet their commitments on nuclear disarmament.

Throughout 1998 and 1999, we had an active stream of German visitors to India – politicians, media leaders, academics and ex-diplomats. The tone they set was constructive. A high point in our discourse with Germany was our President's visit in September 1998. Expectedly, the public statement by the German side included a critical note on our nuclear tests, which was readily toned down at our request. Chancellor Kohl had a relaxed approach and I recall his remark to our President that India posed no problem for them – it was Pakistan and the danger of proliferation by other countries in the region, especially in the Middle East that worried them. This was perhaps a good indication of the focus of the Western concern that I had pointed out earlier. All this is not to suggest that Germany endorsed our nuclear weapons programme; but they were correct, even as they had a pronounced anti-nuclear philosophy.

Action Group Countries: Among the eight countries of the Action Group – the “Nuclear abstainers and renouncers” – Canada was the most active. Perhaps their sensitivity had been sharpened by their pioneering role, from the 1950s onwards, in exporting the means for development of peaceful nuclear energy and other such programmes. They seemed to have a custodial responsibility, and regret, because of the presumption that over the years, what they had supplied was used as an input for military programmes. In India's case, they were no doubt thinking of CIRUS. (The view that the Atoms for Peace programme of the Eisenhower era, though well intentioned, actually resulted in providing nuclear fuel for military programme has been elaborated in a recent article in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.) Their envoy in Delhi, ex-Vienna and a committed

non-proliferationist, was articulate in conveying Canada's criticism.

Australia and New Zealand, also members of this group, had a distinctive anti-nuclear position – witness their strong opposition to the series of French tests in the South Pacific. Australia continued its trenchant opposition for months beyond May 1998. I recall an informal exchange with their Foreign Minister Downer as late as March 2000, in which he asserted that as a friend of India, he had to say that our security had not improved due to our acquiring nuclear weapon capability. In our discussions with Canada and Australia, we drew attention to the fact that they had consistently been under the protection of a nuclear umbrella, explicit or tacit, and that we did not enjoy this protection. Sweden, with its traditional neutrality and a member of the group, was also strong critic.

South Africa/NAM: South Africa was another “Action Group” member and a special case, because of its well-publicised dismantling of the advanced infrastructure for nuclear weapons development built up covertly by the apartheid regime – presumably just short of active nuclearisation, because of Western pressure. It duly reflected this anti-nuclear ethos in dealing with our tests. It appears that South Africa decided to play out its role in NAM rather than through unilateral statements of actions, especially because it was NAM Chairman that year.

To begin with, the collective mood in the NAM Coordinating Committee (Officials’) meeting in Colombia, held just over two weeks after our nuclear tests, was unhelpful, with much support for a strong resolution. However, on that occasion, South Africa did respond to our appeal to good sense and moderated the outcome. We understand that this was due to President Nelson Mandela’s intervention, after he had been approached. The draft of the main document for the NAM Summit in Durban in August 1998 prepared by the host was, however, very problematic from our point of view. We had to work non-confrontationally with South Africa before and during the meeting to soften their highly judgemental wording. This also involved consultation with a number of other leading NAM participants. In the outcome we were helped by the fact that the collective NAM dynamic also includes a basic commitment to disarmament and strong criticism of the older nuclear powers for their failure in this regard. The final resolution on the nuclear aspect reflected this aspect adequately and met our requirements.

South East Asia: India's nuclear tests came at a time which was crucial for ASEAN's consolidation – when the gains of liberation from the constraints of the Cold War were being realised – signalled, for example, by the integration into ASEAN of the Indo-China states. ASEAN was also entering a new phase of accelerated economic growth and regional/global engagement (e.g. formation of the Dialogue Partnerships, APEC, EAC). Equally important for us was that our “Look East” policy was at last taking proper shape and was reciprocated by ASEAN – e.g. our entry into Dialogue Partnership in 1995 and ARF in mid-1997.

Given ASEAN's strong collective personality, it is the collective reaction in South East Asia which is of special interest. The annual Foreign Minister level ARF meeting in Manila in July presented an early opportunity for ASEAN to express a collective view. The run-up to and the actual meeting of Senior Officials (preparatory to the Foreign Ministers' meeting) made it clear that there was a movement favouring a strongly critical resolution.

As background, one recalls that the activist members of ASEAN wanted ARF, right from its inception (1995), to take a forward line in setting up mechanisms for “conflict resolution”, “dispute settlement”, etc. and papers (or non-papers) were prepared to sound out opinion within ASEAN and other ARF members on these ideas. In the outcome, the moderate majority prevailed, and the ASEAN members (i.e. the core) of ARF settled for a more modest programme of CBMs. The rationale was that radical mechanisms would not be acceptable to most ARF members, involving as it did interference and judgements on problems between members. That was in 1995–1997.

Our nuclear tests had inspired the activists to again come out with radical prescriptions, including possible collective censure. Host Philippines, supported by some outsiders such as Japan, Australia, etc. had prepared a draft unacceptable to us. There was even a suggestion (not from within ASEAN) that ARF should specially invite Pakistan to their meeting so that they could examine the issue thoroughly. However, good sense and our demarches prevailed, and the collectivity decided to settle for a milder “Chairman's Statement” in place of the traditional resolution. This experience indicated the principal dynamic within ASEAN, which included a desire not to destabilise relations with India. The activism of outsiders such as Japan and Australia was counterproductive, as the ASEAN members of ARF consider it vitally important that they should always be the core and driving force of ARF.

We have consistently supported this. I have already indicated the reasons for China's restraint on this occasion.

A related factor at work in the nuclear tests aftermath was the South East Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, a concept unanimously supported within ASEAN and also welcomed outside this fraternity. As of 1998, we could not endorse SEANWFZ, though we had nothing against the South East Asian countries' initiative in establishing it, because of our scepticism about the utility of local/regional nuclear disarmament arrangements in general, and our conviction that nuclear disarmament must be addressed as an indivisible global problem. A few years later, we took a more relaxed view accepting SEANWFZ as an authentic project driven mainly by ASEAN. Also noteworthy is that in our briefing interactions with ASEAN envoys here, they emphasised that one of their principal concerns was that the nuclear tests should not destabilise India-China relations and that South Asia should not be destabilised. The latter was of special interest to them given the nature of their interaction with China.

West Asia: We surmised that the mainsprings of West Asian reaction to anything "nuclear" was deep concern about Israeli covert nuclear weapon capability and to use all possible means to contain it, including the mechanism of a possible nuclear weapon free zone in West Asia. The perception in May 1998 seemed to be that in a curious manner India and Israel were on the same wavelength on this issue, i.e., one was an overt, undeclared nuclear state, and the other had just become a covert nuclear weapon-capable state. This background suggested a more than routine disapproval of our tests, although like many other countries they were correct. The nuclear tests also activated the West Asian dynamic of offering to help India-Pakistan reduce tensions. The Iran Foreign Minister's visit at end-May 1998, scheduled earlier, was turned into an attempted mediation effort which we declined politely. At the NAM summit, however, we found the Iranian Vice Minister, who headed the crucial political committee, was helpful in drafting a non-problematic final document.

Africa: The reactions of African countries were, as a rule, in line with the global and NAM mainstream – disapproving, but correct in tone without any animus or special agenda. A few were even supportive. (Mauritius, of course, and notably Zimbabwe.) There was no profiled collective criticism (e.g. OAU/Africa Union), and except South Africa, no other African country joined

the “Action Group of Eight” or any other combative grouping. South Africa’s distinctively critical line was played out in NAM rather than in the African arena per se. Africa’s perceptions on such issues are important, considering the value we attach to our relations and the numerical strength of the countries of Africa, e.g. in NAM and the UN.

Latin America: Many responses were closer to the US Western line, with more activists than in Africa. The nuclear weapon free zone idea was also invoked with a higher profile: of course, there were variations from one country to another.

Multilateral Fora: Collective reactions in leading multilateral fora, especially the UN, are a very distinctive indicator of how the international community works on such occasions. They are also relevant in setting the tone for future deliberations. I recall that almost immediately after 13 May, P-5 representatives met informally in New York. There were no formal public statements or resolutions, but we had already started our interactions in the UN. On 04 June, the Permanent Committee of the P-5 Foreign Ministers met in Geneva at the initiative of China, coincidentally the Chairman of this informal group for that year. This was obviously meant to keep the heat on India.

We understand that the US had worked to moderate the proceedings. The outcome could have been worse, as becomes clear if one compares it with Resolution 1172 of the UN Security Council which met formally on 6 June. It is useful to recall the key elements in this resolution, i.e. India and Pakistan should instantly stop their nuclear programmes and sign the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states; the two countries should address the root cause of the tension between them, including Kashmir. One hears that the US could not, despite its best efforts, prevent China from including these extreme demands, and mention of Kashmir. This had apparently been suggested by China for inclusion at the earlier P-5 meeting as well but this was not unanimously accepted. In coming months, Resolution 1172 figured in almost every multilateral statement and several national pronouncements on our nuclear tests. Of course, we made it clear that the resolution was unacceptable. In both public reactions and private discussions we called for saner counsel.

Also to be taken note of was the G-8 Summit at Birmingham. Its text is a useful example of the most immediate collective reaction and also gives you a flavour of those early days. EU also met at summit level in May 1998 and its statement recapitulated earlier meetings. The CD in Geneva was expectedly an arena for expert discussion.

These collective responses are worth analysing by students of current history as instances of the international community's ways of functioning. Other collective gatherings – NAM, ASEAN, etc. – have already been referred to. Through the initial months, the Ministry of External Affairs was busy drafting a series of responses to these collective statements. These were forthright and factual while also reaffirming our readiness to communicate.

IFAJ: You have spoken about Pakistan's nuclear tests. Could you add your recollection of the aftermath, i.e. global reactions specific to Pakistan, as well as your sense of Pakistan's post-1998 thinking on nuclear matters, and implications for India?

KR: The critical global responses – unilateral and multilateral – to our nuclear tests during the two weeks before the Pakistani tests, included, as expected, tacit admonition and encouragement to Pakistan not to emulate. The G-8 statement of 15 May was among the most articulate. After the Pakistani test, the responses covered both India and Pakistan. The basic charge and criticism applied to both countries, and to some extent, the treatment was also common. For example, the US initiated a dialogue with Pakistan as well. Beyond that point, however, the rationale of criticism and proposed measures diverged significantly.

Most of the public reactions conveyed a sense of India being judged more stringently than Pakistan. This was prompted by the facile impression that it was India that had pressed the trigger, and also by a basic psychological perception of India as a larger country and hence obliged to be more responsible than its smaller neighbours. At the same time, the relatively harder judgement of India also suggests greater stakes, expectations and a sense of India's complexity. The tests also reactivated two diehard stereotypes, i.e. hyphenation of India and Pakistan, and that the India-Pakistan arena would be even more of a "flash point" than in more normal times – i.e., nuclearisation plus Kashmir. These perceptions would have brought cheer to Pakistan: for them there is nothing like India being tarred with the same brush. We have to live with these clichés, in the knowledge that they will only go away with larger strategic changes, which we have to work for.

These aspects did not detract from the gains made in our dialogues. The perceptions and policies of our interlocutors on India and Pakistan were, as a rule, correctly differentiated. Among the major concerns specific to Pakistan was the potential danger of a nuclear weapon-terrorism linkage.

It was amply clear in the days immediately following our nuclear tests that Pakistan's driving force was an obsession for parity with India. Witness the excessively celebratory public mood in Pakistan after their tests, contrasting with our sober reaction. What came through in these and subsequent Pakistani statements and actions was confirmation of their profound psychological need to assure themselves that they are in no way inferior to India, and that their nuclear tests demonstrated that they are in the same league. At the Colombo Summit of SAARC in July 1998, one recalls the thesis offered by senior Pakistani officials that two big powers had now emerged in South Asia and the nuclear dialogue between them should help in the assertion of their role in keeping the region in order.

Given this approach and mentality, it is not surprising that their engagement with our important common task of putting in place updated CBMs, incorporating the nuclear factor, was pro forma, at best. Thus, at the first substantive meeting in October 1998 of the composite dialogue agreed on in the preceding year, Pakistan came up with a draft agenda on CBMs, which was essentially a copy of the advanced CBM regime between the US and USSR/Russia – with elements such as intermediate-range ballistic missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, etc. These were completely out of place. We had to insist that Indo-Pak CBMs should be down to earth, oriented to the situation in our region, reinforcing the CBMs already in place since the late 1980s and early 1990s. Above all, the most fundamental CBM, preparatory to any other provision, would be a commitment by Pakistan to end its sponsorship of cross-border terrorism. This point had also been emphasised in response to an earlier Pakistani proposal at the 1997 UN General Assembly for a non-aggression agreement. We have pointed out that the first requirement of such a treaty would be for Pakistan to end its aggression in the form of trans-border terrorism.

Perhaps due to internal processes and US pressure, Pakistan showed a more serious approach at the CBM exercise in Lahore in February 1999 during the Prime Ministerial visit. The Lahore Memorandum set out an eminently practical agenda. It was agreed to work out CBMs in more detail through joint teams. This was reaffirmed at the SAARC Foreign Ministers' Meeting in April 1999. This process was arrested by Pakistan's Kargil misadventure.

Kargil revealed, or confirmed, Pakistan's essential nuclear strategy – already prefigured in the 1970s and the 1980s, that because of India's conventional military superiority Pakistan was unlikely to achieve its most important objective – seizing Kashmir through conventional war, even guerrilla tactics, as demonstrated in 1948, 1965 and 1971. This could succeed only if Pakistan had an equaliser, i.e. adequate nuclear weapons capability.

This thought was spelt out as early as 1980 by a Pakistani strategist general, focusing explicitly on Kashmir. The equaliser would work as follows: Pakistan launches a shock attack on India. If India succeeds in initiating a rollback, Pakistan could threaten use of nuclear weapons, to stall the Indian rollback not merely to damage but also blackmail on the premise that India would not dare to counter by using its own nuclear weapons for fear of international disapproval and paranoia about a nuclear flash point. This would prevent India from pressing forward on its gains in the initial rollback of Pakistan forces. If the shock attack succeeded despite India's conventional superiority, India would have nothing to fall back on except its nuclear weapons capability, but again international opinion would prevent India from using it. Lack of second strike capability would further restrain India. Thus, both ways, Pakistani nuclear blackmail would work to its advantage.

Kargil was the first occasion for trying out this strategy. In the event, India's conventional superiority did prevail and Pakistan's nuclear blackmail and bluff was called. Besides clinching battlefield control and some diplomatic work, US pressure was a factor. During Kargil, senior Pakistani spokesmen did not fail to publicly highlight Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons. In 2002, President Musharraf remarked, on the sidelines of a regional conference in Central Asia, that nuclear weapons were meant to be used.

These statements need to be evaluated in the context of Pakistan's overall attitude to India and the opacity of their nuclear establishment. In this context, there is an important point on which we need internal clarity, and which we also need to get other countries like the US to understand: there is, appropriately, great concern with the horrors that would follow if the nuclear weapons in Pakistan fall into jihadi hands. But Kargil demonstrated that nuclear weapons in the hands of an unaccountable military clique are also very dangerous, especially when the military is already badly infiltrated by jihadi terrorists. This point needs to be studied in all its manifestations, on a factual basis.

I should not omit to mention an important event which was related to the national experience with the nuclear tests and their aftermath, i.e. the working out of a Nuclear Doctrine by the National Security Advisory Board and made public in August 1999. It is presumed that this has been an important input for an operative security doctrine that includes the nuclear/missile dimension. It would also be appropriate to work out a full-fledged national security concept and scheme including the nuclear dimension, which would guide – and bind – the governments of the day.

IFAJ: Thank you, Sir, for your time and for enlightening us with your views and impressions of those dramatic days.
