

The Diminishing Credibility of Indian “No First Use” Policy

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Abstract

India's nuclear policy of NFU, with conditions attached, has indicated explicitly that New Delhi seeks the nuclear option at lower escalation levels. NFU pledge is very difficult to enforce during a military crisis. Therefore, the BJP government is exploring a policy option where India can maintain the formality of a NFU doctrine but carry on with preparations for first use capacity. BJP's domestic political consolidation and future international developments will subsidize any change in nuclear doctrine. India's nuclear policy shift will be influenced by the continuous strengthening of its nuclear missile forces. Any future policy shift can be judged through procurement, deployment, and command and control structure configuration. The transition in Indian employment posture towards developing usable nuclear weapons as the first strike further reduces the credibility of its declared NFU policy. Any country's declaratory nuclear doctrine is beneficial only if it is credible. India's quest for preemptive counterforce strikes could lead to deterrence instability. India is expanding its nuclear weapons programme under the guise of nuclear mainstreaming. While branding India as a responsible nuclear power, the professed NFU has offered an excuse to discourage foreign criticism

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and scrutiny of India's nuclear expansion. Notwithstanding, the Indian shift from its NFU posture will not impact global powers' behaviour towards New Delhi concerning arrangements like MTCR, NSG, and Australia Group.

² Kumar Sundaram and M. V. Ramana, "India and the Policy of No First Use of Nuclear Weapons," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol.1, no. 1 (2 January 2018), 152–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2018.1438737>.

³ Ministry of External Affairs, "The Cabinet Committee on Security Reviews Perationalization of India's Nuclear Doctrine," (Government of India, 4 January 2003), Available at:https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/20131/The_Cabinet_Committee_on_Security_Reviews_perationalization_of_Indias_Nuclear_Doctrine+Report+of+National+Security+Advisory+Board+on+Indian+Nuclear+Doctrine.(Accessed on November 14, 2021).