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Atoms for Peace Programme" Misused by the Nuclear Weapon Aspirant Countries: Case Study of India

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ABSTRACT

The Atoms for Peace programme was launched by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953 to help countries use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes like energy, medicine, and agriculture. However, some countries used this support to secretly develop nuclear weapons. This paper focuses on India as a case study to show how the country received help for civilian nuclear development but later used it to build nuclear weapons. The research explains how India gained technology and materials from countries like Canada and the United States, and how weak monitoring by international organizations, like the IAEA, failed to stop the misuse. It also discusses how political interests and global alliances allowed India to avoid punishment, even though it was not part of important treaties like the NPT. This study shows that even with international rules, countries can still find ways to develop nuclear weapons if they have strong political goals and international support. Stronger and more effective global systems are needed to stop this from happening again.

Keywords *Atoms for Peace, India nuclear weapons, peaceful nuclear use, nuclear non-proliferation, IAEA, NPT, NSG, nuclear technology misuse, Cold War, international security*

INTRODUCTION

The global nuclearization campaign commenced in the early 1940s once the benign uranium atom was transformed into cancerous radioisotopes in mid-1945 through the 'Manhattan Project' by the USA. ***The US B-29 Bomber pilots dropped 'Little Boy[1]' and 'Fatman[2]' on the Japanese twin cities in the early mornings on 6 and 9 Aug 1945 to witness the emergence of the nuclear era***. The post-1945 history of global nuclear proliferation is marred by a saga of manipulations of treaties and diversions of peaceful nuclear programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction by the aspirant countries. This nuclear weaponization was also securitized by non-nuclear states in the name of Cold War dynamics, characterized by security dilemmas and arms race amongst polar dominions and even by those that were non-aligned like India. At the same time, the experience of mass destruction in Japanese cities triggered a realization of the international community to keep the fissile atom for peace only by promoting beneficial nuclear technology initiatives around the world (Weiss, 2003). ***Ironically, the Atom for Peace program, launched by the USA in 1953, became the prime instrument for equipping India with nuclear weapons while also establishing guidelines/protocols for nuclear safeguarding by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)***. It is important to highlight that the onset of post-WWII decolonization coincided with the emergence of the nuclear era vis a vis the Cold War. For aligning with NATO, the overt '*fusion effort*' through nuclear assistance by the USA and its allies resulted in a covert '*fission reaction'* by Non-Aligned India in 1974 and 1998. ***India labelled its display of extreme violence as a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE), carried out to attain stability in the region, especially to equalize China***. India publicly promoted non-proliferation efforts however, its covert nuclear weapon programme also

[1] '***Little Boy***' - *the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima.*
[2] '***Fatman***' - *the nuclear bomb dropped on Nagasaki.*

continued since 1947 and has taken a vertical turn in the 21st century whereby enhancing range, accuracy, lethality, and delivery means of its strategic capability for achieving greater destructiveness.

Problem Statement

To research the main purposes of the '*Atom for Peace'* programme and how India manipulated it to develop nuclear weapons.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the objectives of the '*Atom for Peace*' programme initiated during the Cold War and the nuclear assistance rendered to non-nuclear countries for its peaceful use.
2. To evaluate the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and the strategy applied by India in manipulating the assistance of the programme for making nuclear weapons while pursuing its aspirations to get a greater share in global affairs (proportionate to its size and population).
3. To determine that despite stringent measures adopted by the international community, a politically determined country like India can defy the international nuclear non-proliferation regime by exploiting its loopholes to acquire nuclear weapons.

LITERATURE REVIEW

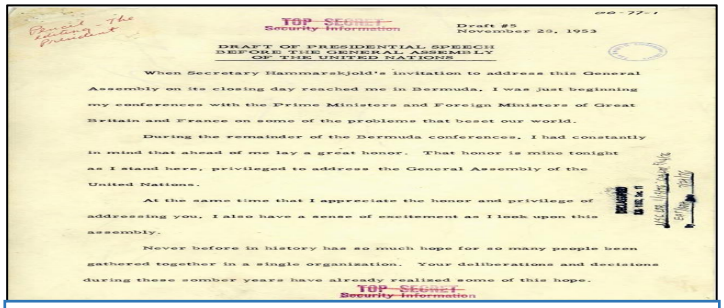
The review of literature remained focused on the '*Atom for Peace'* initiative and the evolution of the Indian Nuclear Programme within the purview of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. The original draft of the '*Atom for Peace*' speech and its documentary retrieved from Eisenhower Memorial Web Archives served as primary sources to understand the main objectives of the programme besides a few publications of the Cold War era by Western scholars on the subject. Evaluation of the Indian nuclear programme and the strategy it applied for the dual use of the atom has been carried out in light of the manuscripts written by Indian and Pakistani scholars especially Kamal Matin Uddin, Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal and Jayati Sarkar. The literature review synthesizes the scholarship on the international nuclear non-proliferation regime that helped to identify the loopholes exploited by India to divert its peaceful nuclear programme to weaponize itself.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analytical study bears ***explanatory and exploratory research*** designs that are being followed with ***qualitative research methods*** for covering the normative and empirical aspects of the topic. A ***deductive approach*** is pursued with both primary and secondary sources in the shape of books, documentaries, articles, and original drafts on the subject.

'Atoms for Peace' to Deter Cold War

Sequel to the international community's efforts, the United Nations Disarmament Commission was formed in 1952 to address disarmament and non-proliferation issues (Shairgojri & Subramanian, 2022). The USA, UK, and USSR had been successful in testing their nuclear devices amid Cold War polarization.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Draft #5
November 20, 1953

DRAFT OF PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH
DEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

When Secretary Hammarskjold's invitation to address this General Assembly on its closing day reached me in Bermuda, I was just beginning my conferences with the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Great Britain and France on some of the problems that beset our world.

During the remainder of the Bermuda conferences, I had constantly in mind that ahead of me lay a great honor. That honor is mine tonight as I stand here, privileged to address the General Assembly of the United Nations.

At the same time that I appreciate the honor and privilege of addressing you, I also have a sense of excitement as I look upon this assembly.

Never before in history has so much hope for so many people been gathered together in a single organization. Your deliberations and decisions during these somber years have already realized some of this hope.

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Figure 1: *Image of 5th Draft of Speech delivered by President Dwight D Eisenhower*
Source: *Atomic Heritage Foundation & Eisenhower Memorial Web Archives*

This added a sense of urgency to decide about the future of nuclear technology which had explored the new dimension of vertical atomic proliferation (Woodbury, 1965, pp. 1–7).

Under these conditions, US President Dwight D Eisenhower finalized the sixth draft, containing a balance of hope and terror, for his UN General Assembly speech (Simon, 2019). The final speech has been preserved in the archives of the Atomic Heritage Foundation (Figure 1). Archives of the speech reveal that he mounted the rostrum of the General Assembly on the afternoon of 8 Dec 1953 to propose a new peaceful dimension of nuclear energy which was yet to be fully discovered (Hewlett et al., 2021). ***Eisenhower argued that it is a matter of choice for the international community between annihilation and peaceful life while asserting that human civilization had never confronted such an absolute alternative before that day***. According to Mara Drogan (2015), the US President showed his willingness to solve the nuclear puzzle by devoting his '*heart and mind'* to searching for a way out so that the '*miraculous inventiveness'* of mankind does not contribute to his demise. ***He therefore suggested an international fissionable materials bank be established to serve the needs of all the UN member states in agrarian, medical, power production, and other industrial sectors*** (Figure 2). Eisenhower essentially hoped that the '*Atoms for Peace'* initiative would eventually lead to disarmament while promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy (Drogan, 2019). ***He also proposed the concept of the IAEA not only to devise protocols for nuclear safeguards but also to keep a strict check on fissionable material to be supplied to UN countries through the bank*** (Nelson, 2009).

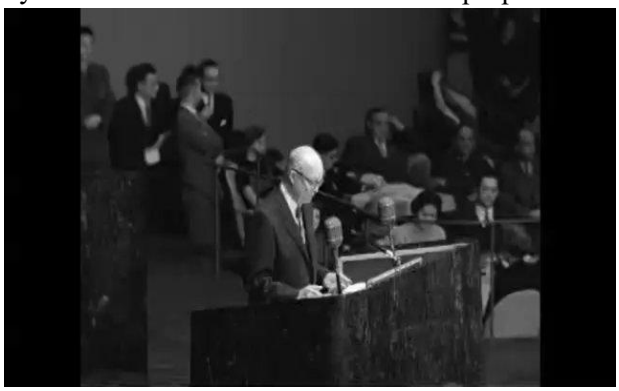

Figure 2: 'Atom for Peace' *speech delivered by President Dwight D Eisenhower in UNGA on 8th Dec 1953.*
Source: *International Atomic Energy Agency*

By the year 1953, the UK, Canada, France, and USSR also had nuclear reactors therefore the US had no monopoly over them. ***To win over the allegiance of new states gaining independence*** (twenty new states between 1945 and 1955; another thirty in the next decade), ***the US and its allies started bilateral agreements with selected countries after the programme was unrolled to supply nuclear reactors and heavy water besides technical assistance for research and sometimes for power generation***. '*Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy'* was also debated in an international conference organised in Geneva in 1955. *The Indian nuclear physicist Homi Jehangir Bhabha, also known as Indian Oppenheimer, presided over the meeting. Here, Eisenhower reaffirmed his pledge to assist* UN member states on peaceful nuclear energy (Krige, 2006).

Indian Armament-Disarmament Dilemma

Given the size, population, industrial capacity, and geographical location, Indian political leadership began to visualize their country emerging as a regional power at the time of independence. With nuclear technology at the forefront, its leadership hoped the new state would prosper economically through big science projects (Sarkar, 2022, p. 17). In pursuit of strategic autonomy and nuclear weaponization, it deliberately reflected technological ambiguity in its nuclear programme. The foundations for research and development in modern disciplines were laid by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research with Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha as its first chairman in 1945. (Kamal Matin Uddin, 2002, pp. 60–61). In a public speech in Bombay in 1946, ***Nehru highlighted that his scientists would ensure the peaceful use of nuclear technology but would use all available means to ensure its national***

security. (Ball, 2014). The very conception of the '***dual use of atoms'*** gave tacit approval to Dr. Bhabha to commence the nuclear weapons programme. Dr Jaspal (2024, p.227) argues that the ***Indian ruling elite projected India as the ardent supporter of nuclear disarmament however, it had kept all the options open to arm itself with nuclear weapons***.

Dr Bhabha was appointed as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) of India once it was established in 1948 and another well-known Indian scientist, Dr C.V. Raman became his adviser. Similarly, in 1954, the Department of Atomic Energy was established under the prime minister. Bhabha Atomic Energy Centre (BARC) was then established in 1956 to process the nuclear fuel cycle with the technical assistance of Canada. India essentially adopted a '***hyper-diversification strategy'*** through formal/informal foreign collaborations and imported dual-use components of nuclear weapons. ***India successfully negotiated the construction of the 40MW 'Canadian Indian Reactor Utility Services' (CIRUS) with Canada in 1956, and the US agreed to supply heavy water for controlled nuclear fission in the Canadian reactor***. CIRUS was fully functional in 1960. With the 1962 defeat of the Indian Army by China, the dual use of the atom steered its orientation towards nuclear weaponization under extreme pressure from the populace and politico-military leadership. Indian parliamentarian Ram Chandra Bade stated on 23 March 1963 that only those who wished to be ruled by the Chinese would oppose the development of nuclear weapons. ***Indian Army ex-chief of staff, General V.N. Sharma accepted that the military leadership pressurised the government to move beyond the threshold after China conducted its nuclear test in 1964*** (Kamal Matin Uddin, p. 63). It is important to highlight that ***India was a signatory to the 1963 partial test-ban treaty therefore, India was forbidden to conduct explosions on land, in the air, or underwater in the seas***. To respond to this armament-disarmament dilemma, ***it started preparing for nuclear tests beneath the ground***. India capitalized on the loopholes of this treaty but did not sign the NPT in 1968 to avoid this dilemma (Sharma, 2024).

The Buddha Smiles

India gave international guarantees to its allies that the acquired civil nuclear facilities would only be utilised for peaceful purposes, however, the pilferage of plutonium was done covertly from the CIRUS reactor to make weapons of mass destruction. ***India tested its nuclear device in the early morning of 19th May 1974 in a secretly prepared underground site at Pokhran***, while ignoring the lessons of peace and non-violence delivered by Lord Buddha (Kumari, 2009). ***Ironically this act of extreme violence was termed 'Smiling Buddha'***. *This so-called PNE had full political and military support and the reason cited by the Indian government was a threat from nuclear China* (Figure 3). It shook the Rajasthan desert and the world with immense magnitude. The US also reacted with mild sanctions against India which paved its way to demonstrate its fullest nuclear capability at the same location in May 1998. This time Indian government and the armed forces officially declared their nuclear weapons and added Pakistan to their threat spectrum.

Figure 3: B*riefing on 'Smiling Buddha' given to Indian PM Indra Gandhi at the Pokhran nuclear test site.*

Analytical Perspective – International Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime

Failure of the IAEA was supplemented by establishing the Nuclear Suppliers Group in the same month (May 1974) to avoid such happenings in the future. Besides India, Canada also punished Pakistan for the crime its neighbour committed, by withdrawing its nuclear support Pakistan tabled a UN resolution in the same year to establish a Nuclear Free Zone in South Asia, but India and the USSR rejected this resolution. After NPT, the

following important non-proliferation measures were adopted by the international community following the 1974 Indian nuclear tests: -

- Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty -1995
- Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty – 1996
- UNSC Resolution 1540 - 2004
- Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - 2021

Here George Perkovich (2001) argues that the ***true supporters of nuclear disarmament had been either driven from effective Indian power or disillusioned by the failure of the international community to implement the non-proliferation regime even after the Cold War. To make the Buddha smile, Russia, France, the UK, and Germany also assisted India in its journey to become a nuclear state*** (Kamal Matin Uddin, 2002, pp. 75–78). Despite UN Security Council Resolution 1540, this assistance continues in the 21st century wherein the USA and other like-minded countries extended their full support to India to become a member of NSG in 2010 following the US-India civil nuclear deal of 2008. ***It is the ugly face of realpolitik that NSG membership was granted to India in violation of its NPT membership prerequisite and even ugliest that NSG members accepted a partner against whose violent act this group was established in 1974*** (Jaspal, p. 243). As per the latest estimates, India has approximately 150 nuclear weapons and is still in pursuit of greater production (Titus, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The case study of Indian nuclearization concludes that ***the weak monitoring and supervision system of the IAEA needs supplementation*** to ensure that civilian nuclear technology is not misused for preparing nuclear weapons. ***Not defining the quantity of fissile material to be used by a state for the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes also remained the core reason for this horizontal proliferation***. India used the '*Atoms for Peace'* programme for nuclear weaponization while exploiting friendship with the USSR & NATO members in the garb of threat from China, exploring gaps in the existing Export Control Policies / International Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime and capitalizing on its strength of home-grown industry & scientific knowledge. Besides realpolitik, ***the initiative failed to visualize that nuclear technology, information, and material provided for peaceful purposes could also be used for making N-bombs***. It can safely be concluded that despite stringent protocols and additional measures adopted by the international community to supplement the nuclear non-proliferation regime, aspiring nations can find ways and means to manipulate the rules of the game in the name of national security. Perhaps these countries realize that ***the cost of breaking the rules in the shape of sanctions is far less than enjoying the status of a nuclear club member in this anarchic world***.

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