

Towards Global No-First Use

What is the issue?

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- India's first indigenous ballistic-missile armed nuclear submarine (SSBN), [INS Arihant](#), recently completed its first deterrence patrol.

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- In this context, it is high time that India makes a reassessment of its policy on nuclear weapons.

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Why is SSBN so significant?

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- The capability to launch nuclear-armed missiles from [nuclear-powered submarines](#) is a greatest form of deterrence a country can possess.

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- It requires a very high degree of technological sophistication -

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- i. to be able to manufacture such submarines indigenously
- ii. to equip them with missiles of the desired range
- iii. to fire them safely

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- The ability to operate one or more SSBNs requires the highest possible degree of professionalism.

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- It covers a wide range of functionaries as

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i. the prime minister

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ii. the national security advisor

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iii. the commander of the strategic forces

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iv. the commanding officer of the submarine

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v. every single member of the crew

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What is the larger need?

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- It is paradoxical that nuclear submarine provides the fullest deterrence only when the captain and his senior officers have the ability to press the symbolic red button on their own.

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- However, despite the government's claims, there are reasons to believe India is not yet there, but is getting closer.

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- The completion of the triad thus calls for a profound **review of India's policy on nuclear weapons.**

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- India is close to achieving credible second strike capability.

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- Given this, it must shift focus from negotiating its way through international nuclear weapons control regimes.

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- It should certainly move to shaping a world where these weapons of mass destructions are not used.

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- India must go from the defensive to the assertive and must champion a global no-first use (GNFU) treaty.

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How has the global scenario so far been?

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- The 20th century method of trying to prevent more countries from possessing a nuclear weapon has failed.

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- The great powers first selectively proliferated nuclear weapons technology to their allies.
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- Meanwhile, they tried to keep it away from their adversaries.
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- They then foisted an unequal treaty on the rest of the world.
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- It aimed at promising to disarm, in return for the rest of the countries committing not to build their own arsenals.
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- They then failed on this promise too and decided that they would keep their bombs in perpetuity.
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- However, they insisted that the rest forever keep to their no-bomb commitments.

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What should the approach be?

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- Non-proliferation might not be dead, but it's a 20th-century idea that has run its course.
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- A realistic idea for the 21st century would be the prevention of first-use of nuclear weapons.
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- Global no-first use (GNFU) can co-exist with, and can even reinforce, the movement towards disarmament.
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- Getting the world's powers to commit verbally and textually to no-first use will be the first step.
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- The strategies to verify, to have assurance, and to deter potential defectors from GNFU and so on will have to be worked out.

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- India should take the lead in changing the international narrative to GNFU, move towards working out strategies and mechanisms to make it work.
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- GNFU can cause China to make new calculations and there is scope here for India and China to collaborate at international security level.
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Source: Business Standard

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