

UNCLEAR DOCTRINE

'No First Use' is integral to India's nuclear doctrine and leaves no space for ambiguity

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has been somewhat careful in speaking of envisioning a change in India's nuclear deterrence posture. In place for 16 years, since January 4, 2003, when the doctrine was adopted formally, New Delhi has said consistently that India's nuclear weapons were based on staggering and punitive retaliation, in case deterrence failed. The retaliation to a nuclear strike, any nuclear strike, whether by tactical or theatre weapons or something bigger, would be crushing enough to deter the possible use of nuclear weapons by an adversary. So the theory goes. On the first death anniversary of former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, and in the nuclear proving ground in Pokhran, the Minister said two things: that the no-first-use has served India well so far, and that what happens in future depends on circumstances. There ought to be no scope for confusion here. Security is, after all, a dynamic concept. It was the security environment in the neighbourhood coupled with the pressure brought by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that forced India out of the nuclear closet and, at the same time, to adopt the no-first-use posture. The structures associated with the doctrine, the command and control that can survive a nuclear strike, the redundancies that are in-built, the secure communications, have all been developed keeping in view the posture perspective.

But there is a danger that the minister's remark could spark off a nuclear arms race, given the strategic paranoias that have been at work in this part of the world for over half a century. In the elections of 2014, the BJP's manifesto had references to an intention to update and revise the nuclear doctrine, but that went nowhere. It is conceivable that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of non-state actors in Pakistan, but even in such scenarios that warrant pre-emptive action, a nuclear strike cannot be a viable option. It would have been much better if Mr. Singh had elaborated on his thoughts so that a debate could have taken place, and not kept his remarks enigmatic. In a nuclear circumstance it is much better to convey the overwhelming nature of the deterrence than to keep the potential adversary guessing. In this respect it is a good idea for the government to make public any periodic review in its strategic posture. The no-first-use policy comes with being a confident nuclear power. For him to state the future is open is to say nothing and at once imply everything. In matters of nuclear doctrine, it is important to be clear above all else. Nothing must be left to interpretation.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Doctrine		Creed, credo, dogma, belief, conviction
Ambiguity		Ambivalence, equivocation
Envision		Visualize, imagine, envisage, picture
Deterrence		Embargo, stoppage, constraint, hobble
Posture		Position, stance, attitude
Adopt		Embrace, take on, acquire, espouse, assume
Consistent		Accordant, coherent, compatible, concordant
Staggering		Deeply shocking, astonishing
Punitive		Penal, harsh, severe, stiff, austere, stringent
Retaliation		Revenge, vengeance, reprisal, retribution
Confusion		Uncertainty, indecision, hesitation, qualms
Dynamic		Energetic, spirited, active, lively, zestful
Closet		Secret, covert, surreptitious, clandestine
Redundancy		Sacking, dismissal, lay off, discharge
Paranoias		Extreme / unreasonable feeling
Conceivable		Imaginable, possible, plausible, feasible
Pre-emptive		Annexation, assumption, attachment, confiscation, repossession
Viable		Workable, feasible, practicable, practical
Elaborate		Complicated, detailed, intricate, complex, knotty, serpentine, convoluted, tangled
Enigmatic		Mysterious, puzzling, mystifying, inexplicable
Overwhelming		Very large, enormous, profuse, inordinate
Potential		Possible, likely, prospective, probable
Adversary		Opponent, rival, enemy, foe, nemesis, combatant
Imply		Implicit, indirect, hinted, insinuated, inferred
Interpretation		Explanation, elucidation, expounding

TAKING ON TB

Keeping the prices of the new drug low is essential for increased treatment uptake

The anti-tuberculosis drug pretomanid recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will be a game changer for treating people with extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) and those who do not tolerate or respond to now available multidrug-resistant TB

(MDR-TB) drugs. That pretomanid is only the third drug in the last 40 years to get FDA approval highlights the scarcity of new drugs to treat TB bacteria that are rapidly developing resistance against most available drugs. The all-oral, three-drug regimen of bedaquiline, pretomanid, and linezolid (BPaL) had a 90% cure rate in a phase III trial in South Africa involving 109 participants. In contrast, the current treatment success rate for XDR-TB and MDR-TB is about 34% and 55%, respectively. Importantly, the regimen was found to be safe and effective in curing TB in people living with HIV. The safety and efficacy were tested in 1,168 patients in 19 clinical trials in 14 countries. Unlike 18-24 months needed to treat highly-resistant TB using nearly 20 drugs, the BPaL regimen took just six months, was better tolerated and more potent in clearing the bacteria. The shorter duration is more likely to increase adherence to therapy and improve treatment outcomes. According to the World Health Organisation, in 2017, there were an estimated 4.5 lakh people across the world with MDR-TB, of which India accounted for 24%, and about 37,500 with XDR-TB. With only a low percentage of MDR-TB cases being treated, the actual number of people who do not tolerate or respond to available MDR-TB drugs and so will be eligible to receive the BPaL regimen is unknown. Though the total number of people who will require the new drug may not be high, these are people who have very little alternative treatment options that are safe and efficacious. Also, the number of those who would need a pretomanid-based regimen is increasing due to rising drug resistance.

While the availability of a potent drug is welcome news, it remains to be seen if it would be made affordable, particularly in the developing countries where the burden of XDR-TB and MDR-TB is the highest. TB Alliance, a New York-based international NGO, which developed and tested the drug, has already signed an exclusive licensing agreement with a generic-drug manufacturer for high-income markets. Unlike in the case of bedaquiline, where its prohibitive cost has severely restricted access especially in the developing countries, pretomanid might become affordable. In line with the TB Alliance's commitment to affordability and sustainable access, the drug will be licensed to multiple manufacturers in about 140 low- and middle-income countries, including India. Making the drug affordable to those with extreme form of drug resistance will be highly commendable and a desperately needed model to be followed. After all, there is a compulsion to keep the prices low and increase treatment uptake to stop the spread of highly drug-resistant TB bacteria. Studies have shown an increase in the number of new patients who are directly infected with drug-resistant bacteria.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Take on		Oppose, combat, fight, battle, skirmish
Uptake		Understanding, comprehension
Scarcity		Meagre, dearth, paucity
Oral		Spoken, verbal, unwritten, vocal
Regimen		A prescribed course of medical treatment (diet / exercise
Contrast		Difference, dissimilarity, disparity
Efficacy		Effectiveness, success, productiveness, potency
Potent		Powerful, strong, vigorous, mighty, formidable
Adherence		Attachment, commitment
Outcome		Result, aftermath, upshot, restraining
Prohibitive		Proscriptive, restrictive, restraining
Sustainable		Checkable, confirmable, demonstrable, provable
Commendable		Admirable, praiseworthy, laudable, estimable, creditable