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“MAINTAINING NUCLEAR DETERRENCE & ADVANCING NUCLEAR SECURITY ARE SEPARATE GOALS”: INDIA AT THE NSS-2016

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The final Nuclear Security Summit (NSS-2016) concluded on April 01, 2016, with India announcing several contributions to the nuclear security regime. At the NSS, India finally decided to join the ‘Gift Basket’ which India had refrained from in all the previous years. One of the key measures includes Indian willingness to accord a high national priority to nuclear security through strong institutional framework, independent regulatory agency and trained and specialized manpower. India also pledged to develop technology in order to deter and defend nuclear terrorism. In the coming years India would also extend its support to IAEA through contribution of \$1 million to the nuclear security fund and hold a workshop on International Physical Protection Assessment Service (IPPAS) in India. Other areas of the basket diplomacy include, joining of a Trilateral Initiative with US-South Korea-Netherlands that would oversee the implementation of measures to strengthen

nuclear security by the subscribing states, and the participation in counter smuggling, sharing of best practices in nuclear security through the Centre of Excellence (CoE) already operational in New Delhi since 2010, as the Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP). And lastly, India announced its participation in the follow up of NSS contact group in Vienna.

While an upsetting remark by President Obama- hyphenating India-Pakistan can raise doubts about the Indian success at the NSS; his remarks and Indian commitments at the NSS could be delinked. The Indian ‘Gift Basket diplomacy’ at the summit should be welcomed for various reasons.

The NSS platform could be viewed as a space to further Indian nuclear diplomacy through spearheading the cause of ‘softer nuclear issues’ that matter. Given the status of India, in the NPT regime, there hardly remains any areas of communication where it can directly convey



its non-proliferation commitments. High profile conferences led by the IAEA and multilateral initiatives on nuclear power do offer some space, however, the agenda for nuclear diplomacy gets hijacked by the large number of participants. The NSS on the contrary was structured as a grouping of not many but few select participants. Additionally, the IAEA initiatives are led forward as initiative of multiple partners. On the other hand, the NSS had put forward an innovative concept of 'Gift Basket' that enabled each country to offer a nuclear security contribution of its own choice. By offering a 'gift basket' on its own term, a convenient nuclear security commitment could be made without much debate on 'hard nuclear issues' such as missile proliferation and test bans.

Given the status of Indian nuclear exceptionalism, combined with Indian nuclear power ambitions that aim at the expansion of nuclear energy industry domestically as well as internationally, the need for such a diplomatic platform is heightened. Ever since the US-India civilian nuclear cooperation, India has continued to reach out to other international players in order to advance its nuclear energy interests. This can be gauged by the scope and number of civilian nuclear cooperation accords India has entered into. Today, India is cooperating with almost all the big players in the field of global nuclear energy, such as France, US, Russia, Australia etc. An ideological stand on Indian nuclear power future that promotes nuclear-

diplomatic abstinence could prove to be hurtful especially when the course of promotion of nuclear energy industry has already been set. There is no evidence available that suggests that India seeks reversal of its nuclear power expansion. The graph of future growth of nuclear energy may fluctuate; however, a U-turn on the nuclear energy road ahead is not predicted in the foreseeable future.

Additionally, it is important to observe that the Indian non-proliferation conundrum is unique. It is a non-NPT member with declared nuclear weapons capability; at the same time it boasts of a nuclear doctrine that is peaceful/defensive in nature. While all this holds true, the NFU policy is not taken very seriously by the critics. Moreover, New Delhi in the last few years has wisely refrained from posturing nuclear disarmament. In short, any platform that is remotely related to conveying a responsible Indian nuclear behaviour is difficult to access. A continued participation to the NSS agenda would at least ensure an uninterrupted dialogue among the international nuclear security community.

What has NSS delivered?

The Nuclear Security Summit (NSS-2016) has finally concluded its six years journey. There were expectations that the Summit could transcend into an institutionalised mechanism in its final quarter. While no such mechanism has evolved, the four summits have started a thread of 'softer nuclear security issues' that have

witnessed a wilful participation of countries. It is now recognised that the world needs a 'nuclear security culture' surpassing the timeline of summits. It is further established that a nuclear security norm is urgently desired. The participating states are indeed willingly looking forward to participate in an international behaviour that seeks taking responsibility for reducing nuclear risks.

Few days before the NSS's final kickoff, the Amendment of the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM/A) had more than 30 ratifications pending, comprising big names like Russia, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Denmark, Finland, Jordan, Libya, Norway, and few states from the Central Asian, Middle Eastern region. It was apprehended that the CPPNM/A ratification might not see the light of day.¹ Interestingly, during the course of the Summit many countries pledged to deposit their instruments of ratifications. As on 01 April 2016, 102 state parties out of 153 have deposited their instrument of ratifications.² For the CPPNM/A to legally come into force, 2/3rd of state parties are needed to ratify it; post which, within 30 days the CPPNM/A would become a legally binding instrument to physically protect nuclear material domestically. This implies a big step forward in the evolving nuclear security architecture.

During the course of two days of the Summit process, countries such as Azerbaijan,

Cameroon, Kuwait, Montenegro and Serbia too ratified the CPPNM/A. The status of ratification for the aforementioned big outliers still remains the same. However, the good news is that, the minimum of 2/3rd of needed ratifications are now complete. Clearly, in the final stage of the NSS-2016, the CPPNM/A ratification can be counted as one big achievement. The NSS continues as an informal working group that lacks any coercive mechanism. It has retired as a Presidential legacy – only to be carried forward by already existing institutions such as the IAEA, Interpol, the UN and a legally binding multilateral arrangement such as CPPNM/A. India has ratified the CPPNM/A long before the NSS was even conceived. Thus, in a way, what India has done at the NSS is only some reinforcement of the nuclear security policy it has already been practicing.

Viewed in the context of the South Asian nuclear reality, combined with the idea of nuclear realism in international politics, the Indian strategic community has maintained the sustenance of India's nuclear capability. While scholars may differ on the quality of nuclear deterrence India has adopted; the necessities of nuclear weapons capability remain unchanged. The NSS does not in any manner compel India to accede to multilateral measures such as the FMCT, CTBT etc that aims at capping of weapons capability. On the contrary it only pushes India to reaffirm its own national commitments relating to nuclear security. Nuclear deterrence and

nuclear security are related, although as separate goals, they can be pursued in a complimentary manner.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ For Details see, Hina Pandey, "Nuclear Security Summits (NSS-2016): Expectation Vs Reality", *In-Focus*, Centre for Air Power Studies.

² Fact Sheet, "Status of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material", *The White House*, Office of the Press Secretary, April, 01, 2016, Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/01/fact-sheet-status-2005-amendment-convention-physical-protection-nuclear>, Accessed on 04 April 2016.