USING NUCLEAR WEAPONS FIRST: "A HELL OF AN ALTERNATIVE"

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At the time of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, President Kennedy was presented with a set of alternative courses of action in response to the Soviet deployment of nuclear tipped missiles in Cuba. These included undertaking military strikes on the missile bases in Cuba; invasion of the island; or a naval blockade of the country. The American President chose the last option because it was considered the least destabilising. The understanding of his security advisors was that any of the options employing US military force would quickly lead to Moscow retaliating by overrunning Berlin. The US would then have to get into a "general war" which would, at some stage, require Washington to use nuclear weapons in a first strike, but also be prepared to suffer nuclear retaliation—an option that was described by President Kennedy to his Joint Chiefs of Staff as "a hell of an alternative."[1]

Indeed, from the time of the first demonstration of the destructive power of the nuclear weapon in 1945, there has been considerable soul-searching on the actual use of the weapon for national security. In 1950, George Kennan pithily articulated a crucial question before then US Secretary of State:

> "Are we to rely upon weapons of mass destruction as an integral and vitally important component of our military strength, which we would

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1. As cited by Daryl G Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 120.

> expect to *employ deliberately, immediately, and unhesitatingly* in the event that we become involved in a military conflict with the Soviet Union? Or are we to retain such weapons in our national arsenal only as a deterrent to the use of similar weapons against ourselves and as a *possible means of retaliation* in case they are used?"[2]

The dilemma of when (and the associated issue of where) to use the nuclear weapon—in a first strike on counterforce targets or in punitive retaliation on cities—has preoccupied every country that has possessed it. Which of these uses better establishes credible deterrence? Does first use deter more effectively? Or, is it the threat of retaliation that carries greater credibility? In sixty years of the existence of the weapon no consensus has been reached on these questions.

An examination of the currently prevailing nuclear doctrines of the nine states possessing nuclear weapons reveals the widespread acceptance of first use as a popular deterrent strategy. Only two of the nine countries have opted for a no-first-use (NFU) strategy. And even these are dismissed as declaratory statements and the NFU is largely treated as meaningless and useless. Is this really true? Is the first use doctrine more credible and better at deterrence than NFU?

This essay explores the value of NFU as a meaningful deterrence strategy. It briefly analyses why militaries tend to be inclined in favour of offensive strategies, but then highlights the limitations—both logistically and politically—of executing a militarily useful nuclear offence in a situation where secure second strike capabilities are available with the adversary. And, this is the case with at least eight out of the nine nuclear armed states today, even if one was to be sceptical about the robustness of the North Korean nuclear arsenal to a first strike by a country like the USA. But even in this scenario, one cannot discount the possibility of China stepping in to support the DPRK, thereby bringing its own secure second strike capability into play.

2. As cited in Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, Third Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 63.

Therefore, in the current state of nuclear relations, what is the value of first use when nuclear retaliation is a certainty? Can any rational actor find circumstances compelling enough to use the weapon first, suffer nuclear retaliation, and yet feel that it has come out better in a conflict? If the answer to this is in the negative, which it should be given that the damage caused to modern megacities by even modest fission weapons would be unimaginable, then is the threat of first use credible at all?

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In fact, there is an inherent paradox of nuclear deterrence that gets magnified with first use—it is believed that it may be rational to make a first use threat, but it is not rational to carry it out. If it is not rational to carry it out, then how can the threat be credible? And if it is not credible, then why should it deter? But, if it does not deter, why do states retain first use strategies and are dismissive of NFU? Does not the presence of secure retaliatory capabilities make the NFU credible and the first use incredible? Are there any other benefits of an NFU that can better address contemporary challenges? These are some of the questions that this essay seeks to address. Towards this end, it offers three hypotheses:

- There is value in no-first-use as a potent and viable deterrent strategy that is more credible than first use in present times.
- NFU can help in lessening existential nuclear risks and serve the cause of strategic stability.
- NFU can be an effective tool of non-proliferation and disarmament and thus contribute to international security.

In a situation where both sides have secure second strike capabilities, even if it is not a situation of mutual assured destruction, a nuclear first strike, however splendid it might be, cannot rule out the possibility of nuclear retaliation. Hence, the calculation of the first user cannot be limited to the damage it will cause by his first strike, but must also take into account the damage in space and time that it will suffer from the adversary's response.

MILITARIES PREFER OFFENCE, BUT WHY NUCLEAR FIRST USE IS NOT A GOOD IDEA

Militaries like to function according to standard operating procedures (SOPs)—whether in peacetime or war operations. This preference leads to a propensity for offensive doctrines where the armed forces have thought through their strategy and devised SOPs to address premeditated scenarios. Offence allows the military to stay with its pre-deliberated course of action while denying the adversary the advantage of being able to play out his moves. As argued by Barry Posen, "A military organisation prefers to fight its own war and prevent its adversary from doing so ... An organisation fighting the war it planned is likely to do better than one that is not."[3]

With conventional weapons, this may be a prudent approach. The armed forces can concentrate on the first phase of war to be undertaken by them at the time and place of their choice and thereby either increase the chance of their victory or lessen the damage of war on themselves. But the equation gets skewed with the entry of nuclear weapons. In a situation where both sides have secure second strike capabilities, even if it is not a situation of mutual assured destruction, a nuclear first strike, however splendid it might be, cannot rule out the possibility of nuclear retaliation. Hence, the calculation of the first user cannot be limited to the damage it will cause by his first strike, but must also take into account the damage in space and time that it will suffer from the adversary's response with a weapon of

3. Barry R. Posen, "The Sources of Military Doctrine," in Robert Art and Kenneth Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), p 24.

mass destruction. Therefore, despite an offensive nuclear strategy, neither can victory be assured and nor the extent of damage, owing to the very nature of the weapon, be reduced enough to be deemed acceptable. Is it then useful, and more importantly, credible to threaten first use of nuclear weapons?

It is often argued that a possessor of nuclear weapons is likely to be provoked into using the weapon if the country faces the prospect of a conventional defeat. It would then be left with no option but to use the nuclear weapon. But even in such a situation how does a country gain by using this weapon because once it has done so, its fate shifts from being defeated-now-but-living-to-fight-another-day to one of severe damage/annihilation depending on the state of its geographical, material and human capacities. Jonathan Schell explained this dilemma well when he questioned, "For how can it make sense to 'save' one's country by blowing it to pieces? And what logic is there in staving off a limited defeat by bringing on unlimited, eternal defeat? Nuclear deterrence is like a gun with two barrels, of which one points ahead and the other points back at the gun's holder."[4] Robert McNamara made a similar argument based on his experience of more than 40 years in the field of nuclear strategy and war plans. He wrote, "During that time [when in office], I have never seen a piece of paper that outlined a plan for the United States or NATO to initiate the use of nuclear weapons with any benefit for the United States or NATO … To launch weapons against a nuclear-equipped opponent would be suicidal. To do so against a non-nuclear enemy would be militarily unnecessary, morally repugnant, and politically indefensible."[5] Though McNamara might have expressed this in writing only in 2005, he claims that he, as well as President Kennedy, understood this in the 1960s itself but never made any such statements since they were "totally contrary to established NATO policy." He categorically states that there was no way to effectively contain a nuclear strike and that there can be no guarantee against unlimited escalation once the first nuclear strike occurs.

4. Jonathan Schell, *The Abolition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 54.
5. Robert McNamara, "Apocalypse Soon," *Foreign Policy*, May-June 2005.

Secondly, it is questioned whether a country should retain NFU even if it gets to know that the adversary is preparing for a nuclear strike? Should not nuclear pre-emption then be the right step? The answer to this lies in understanding that even preparation is no guarantee of a nuclear strike. Rather, it may well be part of a strategy of "coercive diplomacy." It is not a coincidence that nearly all of the more than 50 incidents of threat of use of nuclear weapons until now have actually intended coercion.[6] Therefore, despite the apparent show of readiness, there will, more likely than not, still be a chance that nuclear weapons would not actually come into use. But by striking first in the face of apparent readiness on the other side, a country would end up inviting retaliation for certain. A country even with a first use doctrine may or may not use its nuclear weapons despite the projected preparedness, but after having been struck and where the first strike has not been disarming or decapitating (which is well-nigh impossible with the kinds of arsenals states with nuclear weapons today have), retaliation would be a certainty.

Meanwhile, the actual act of using the nuclear weapon first cannot be as easy as it is made out to be since the country has to take into account not just what would happen in the first phase of war, but also on how it would proceed and end, scenarios which are not easy to coherently contemplate in the presence of robust retaliatory nuclear weapons. Hence despite having a first use strategy, most nations not only find it very difficult to actually execute it, but also politically limiting to do so. This is a thought worth considering since conventional wisdom has us believe that first use is more liberating compared to a counterstrike strategy. But serious thought to actual execution of first use reveals the complexities involved in doing so. After all, the purpose of first use should be to convey deterrence through communication of four essential messages:

- I will not hesitate to use the weapon first.
- By doing so, I would be able to substantively improve my situation.
- My first strike will interfere with and degrade your second strike capability.

6. For a comprehensive list of incidents until 1996 see Jasjit Singh, "Why Nuclear Weapons," in Jasjit Singh, ed., *Nuclear India* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1998), pp. 12-13.

- I will be able to come out of the crisis looking better after the use of the nuclear weapon than without its use.

Such communication can carry weight where there is a nuclear monopoly in an adversarial equation. But in a situation where the adversary has a survivable nuclear force, retaliation can seriously complicate the calculations of the first user on how it would "look better" after suffering nuclear damage itself. As graphically explained by a strategist, "Engaging in a nuclear war with a nation with whom one is in a condition of mutual vulnerability would be like running a red light across a high speed, heavily travelled, multilane highway under conditions of near zero visibility. One might make it safely across, but one could not form a reasonable expectation that one would."[7]

Therefore, the essential question that the first user has to ask and answer is whether in a state of mutual vulnerability, the initiator can be in a better position than the one that retaliates? Or can NFU convey its own set of messages more convincingly:

- I will not be the first to use nuclear weapons.
- But any first strike against me would trigger an assured retaliation to cause damage of a kind that you would find unacceptable.
- My counterstrike will ensure that your material situation is worse off after your using the weapon first.
- I might suffer losses, but you will not escape either and you would have brought it upon yourself.

As is clear from above, a no-first-use strategy offers to concede the onus of escalation to the adversary and in that sense becomes more liberating. The military can adopt a more relaxed posture rather than straining the nuclear leash at a hair-trigger alert system that can easily fall prey to misadventure. Neither does it have to perfect the logistics of first use which is not easy considering that it would involve coordinating a nuclear attack on a diversified

7. Steven P. Lee, *Morality, Prudence, and Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 16.

The decision to use the nuclear weapons first is made even more difficult by the knowledge that unlike the case of conventional weapons, the nuclear forces that inflict the damage on the adversary will not really protect own state either. Rather, they would end up inviting retaliation. Therefore, rather than having the first strike option, it would be better to take measures to deter the adversary. Deterrence is, in fact, the only real defence against nuclear weapons.

arsenal with speed and surprise to hit the adversary's forces before they can be launched or dispersed, addressing basic questions such as whether to launch aircraft first or missiles, how many to launch in the first wave, etc.

At the same time, the political leadership is freed from the psychological pressure of making the difficult choice of being the first to use a weapon of mass destruction. This is sure to weigh on him/her personally for the damage caused and also bring international opprobrium for having breached a nuclear taboo. And to top it all, to do so in the knowledge that own vulnerability to retaliation can yet not be escaped. In democracies, the limits on the political leadership when called upon to make this decision are well understood. But even in the more autocratic systems, this cannot be an easy choice given that today's societies are relatively invigorated by the modern means of communication enabled by the information revolution and these do influence national choices. Even the DPRK, a really "isolated" country by today's standards, could go only so far with its nuclear brinkmanship.

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In the face of such logic, the NFU appears far more sensible and credible. While a country would find it very difficult to use the weapon first, the decision

of retaliation would be far easier, seemingly legitimate, and more guilt-free to make. In fact, by projecting assured retaliation, a nation displays greater confidence, and hence greater deterrence credibility. By placing the onus of escalation on the adversary, while retaining the initiative of punitive nuclear retaliation, a country with a no-first-use strategy steers away from nuclear brinkmanship. And, by establishing the nuclear weapon as an instrument of punishment through retaliation, the country lessens the possibility of deterrence from breaking down, and thus aims to minimise, if not prevent, the very use of the nuclear weapon. NFU actually encourages the possibility of "no use" instead of "sure use." This is clearly demonstrated in the following table.[8]

Nuclear Posture Country 1	**Nuclear Posture Country 2**	**Nuclear Threshold**	**Chance of Nuclear War**
First Use	First Use	Low	Very High
No-First-Use	No-First-Use	High	Very Low/Nil
First Use	No-First-Use	Relatively High	Relatively Low

As is evident from the table, through NFU coupled with assured retaliation, a country can rein in the initiative more in favour of no use of nuclear weapons. Unless the adversary is completely irrational, has suicidal tendencies or is utterly unmindful of national survival and international public opinion, the possibility of a nuclear war should not arise. But in case of having to deter a rational actor, projection of assured retaliation while maintaining NFU can enforce effective deterrence. This validates the first hypothesis that a credible retaliatory strategy deters effectively and, in fact, better than a first use strategy given the contemporary nuclear capabilities.

HOW DOES NFU PROMOTE STRATEGIC STABILITY?

First use postures based on projection of nuclear war fighting require large arsenals of first strike weapons (such as accurate missiles with multiple independently retargetable vehicles), nuclear superiority to carry out counterforce attacks against an adversary's retaliatory forces, elaborate and

8. Manpreet Sethi, *Nuclear Strategy: India's March towards Credible Deterrence* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2009), p. 134.

NFU requires building nuclear forces which need not be necessarily in large numbers, but which are ensured survivability through a mix of measures that include hardening of nuclear storage sites, deception, mobility, dispersal over different delivery vectors, and a level of defence. The core of this strategy lies in projecting the invulnerability of a sufficient part of the arsenal.

delegated command and control structures to handle launch on warning or launch under attack postures to coordinate simultaneous nuclear attacks from and over dispersed forces. None of this is conducive to strategic stability especially in the present nuclear realities where many nuclear adversaries do not enjoy the luxury of being geographically apart. Rather, in some cases such as India-China and India-Pakistan, unsettled boundary issues and border skirmishes are routine events. In such a situation, maintaining nuclear forces in a state of hair-trigger readiness for first use not only raises the possibility of an accidental nuclear war based on a miscalculation, but also lowers the threshold of nuclear war in a crisis situation.

It may be recalled that in the early years of the Cold War, warheads of the two Superpowers were not routinely mated, nor necessarily co-located with delivery systems. It was the subsequent development of advanced safety features designed into modern warheads and the advent of sophisticated administrative controls on nuclear weapons that made higher alert levels possible. Ironically, however, after keeping their nuclear missiles on hair-trigger alert for years, the two Superpowers found the best nuclear risk reduction and confidence building in de-alerting these and separating warheads from delivery systems! These form a natural part of the NFU posture.

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automaticity to retaliation which can cause damage that the adversary is unlikely to find acceptable in lieu of the gains made through the first use.

By virtue of the nature of its force structure and posture requirements, an NFU naturally eliminates the need for forward deployment of nuclear systems, and thus reduces the likelihood of accidental or unauthorised use. Force postures required to cater for launch on warning or launch under attack require pre-delegation of authority to launch nuclear weapons down a clearly defined chain of command and this can never be a risk-free option. The US and USSR experienced this first-hand with their tactical nuclear weapons (TNW). Battles where use of TNW was envisaged were described as "battles of great confusion." Even when the authority of launch was delegated it was equally realised that situations where the use of nuclear weapons was involved "could never be a purely 'tactical' decision, taken by the local commander according to the state of battle. It would be a strategic decision to be taken at the highest level and with reference to the prevailing, overall political and military situation."[9] But whether this could be effectively enforced posed a huge challenge given that in times of crisis, lack of information, misinformation and misjudgments could often become causes of confrontation without either side having the intention to precipitate one. As Robert McNamara once said, "It is correct to say that no well-informed, coolly rational political or military leader is likely to initiate the use of nuclear weapon. But political and military leaders, in moments of severe crisis, are likely to be neither well-informed not coolly rational."[10]

NFU eases this dilemma considerably. In fact, the NFU goes to alleviate the adversary's insecurity, which, in turn, is beneficial by relieving pressure on its leaders for launching a pre-emptive strike. If the adversary were constantly under the fear that a nuclear strike was imminent, his own temptation to use his nuclear force would be higher. But, the NFU helps to mitigate the "use or lose" pressure and thereby lessens crisis instability since it sends a message that does not place the adversary on the edge at all

9. An assessment of William Kaufmann as cited by Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, p. 105.
10. Robert McNamara, *Blundering into Disaster: Surviving the First Century of the Nuclear Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987) pp. 13-14.

Managing bilateral Superpower nuclear relations was not easy and history recounts many a tense moment. In the contemporary world where nuclear-armed nations are many, several sharing common and in some cases even contested borders, the challenge of creating strategic stability is exacerbated manifold. In such a scenario, the adoption of no-first-use doctrines would have many benign implications for strategic stability.

times. Rather, it makes it feel more secure, a condition that enhances deterrence stability. To that extent, actions taken by nations to strengthen the survivability of their arsenal can be stabilising and reassuring. The logic of this was aptly explained by Robert McNamara in the context of Soviet hardening their missile sites. He wrote,

> "In a period of tension I wanted the Soviet leaders to have confidence that those forces would survive an American attack and would be capable of retaliating effectively. Then they would not feel a pressure to use them pre-emptively … I had no desire to face, in a period of tension, an adversary who felt cornered, panicky and desperate and who might be tempted to move irrationally."[11]

In fact, reassurance is a critical aspect of deterrence based on no-first-use and it significantly reduces strategic instability. The nuclear situation is at ease when both nations do not feel the need to go after the other's nuclear weapons for fear of losing own and where neither feels the need to go after the other with nuclear weapons since the costs of assured destruction that neither could escape would be too high.

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11. Ibid.

the potential to lessen interstate tensions, increase mutual confidence and thus reinforce a cycle of positives.

HOW DOES NFU PROMOTE NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT?

At this moment countries do not appear ready to give up their nuclear arsenals and in fact, the role of nuclear weapons seems to be expanding beyond the basic purpose of nuclear deterrence. The challenge for non-proliferation as arising from this increasing sense of the value of the nuclear weapon is well evident today. And why not? Why should countries be expected to eschew a weapon that is perceived as effective for deterrence, including deterring conventional weapons, allowing blackmail, and earning monetary and political benefits? In fact, two countries have well shown the multi-role utility of nuclear weapons. North Korea and Pakistan harbour strong security suspicions and perceive their nuclear weapons as "strategic equalisers" as well as potent bargaining chips. The DPRK has never been shy of brandishing its nuclear capability to drive a hard bargain with a country as powerful as the United States. Islamabad, meanwhile, has intelligently used its nuclear weapons to deter a conventional war with a superior Indian military even as it has actively pursued a policy of terrorism.

If every country was to commit not to be the first to use the weapon, there would be no use—leading to a drop in the stock value of the weapon over a period of time. In turn, this would encourage non-proliferation by sending a strong signal of the diminishing utility of the weapon. At the same time, it would lessen the drive of each NWS for new and modernised nuclear arsenals.

Examples such as these tend to add value to the nuclear weapon and indirectly promote proliferation. It is another matter that Pakistan has even been involved in direct proliferation, but the point here is about the spread of the sentiment of the nuclear weapon being a worthwhile possession. As long as this impression is not removed, non-proliferation can never hope to be a sustainable proposition.

One way, however, of reducing the salience of the nuclear weapon can be found in the universal adoption of NFU by the states possessing these weapons. If every country was to commit not to be the first to use the weapon, there would be no use—leading to a drop in the stock value of the weapon over a period of time. In turn, this would encourage non-proliferation by sending a strong signal of the diminishing utility of the weapon. At the same time, it would lessen the drive of each NWS for new and modernised nuclear arsenals. Rather, as the weapons fall into a state of disuse, they would lose their salience and hence become dispensable, aiding the move towards their eventual elimination.

A case for convincing/compelling states to accept a universal NFU may be made on three grounds. Firstly, the NFU would allow the NWS to retain the notional sense of security that they derive from their national nuclear arsenals. NWS would only pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, but could always retaliate to inflict unacceptable damage. They would have the freedom to possess the weapons but would pledge not to use them first. Gradually, the desire to possess, or improve an unusable weapon would lessen, making it easier to give up the weapon. Therefore, this step would work towards enhancing the gradual irrelevance of the nuclear weapon, especially when reinforced by a ban on use or threat of use of the weapon, quite as on the pattern and experience of the 1925 Geneva Convention.

Secondly, an international consensus on and acceptance of NFU would put pressure on all countries. A united approach could provide the necessary firmness to the international community to deal with possible holdouts. Thirdly, as explained in the first section of this essay, no country can hope to come out better after the first use of nuclear weapons against another nuclear state with a robust second strike force. Therefore, first use against a nuclear adversary that also happens to have superior conventional and substantive nuclear capability is nothing short of suicidal for the first user. The admittance of this reality would demonstrate the futility of retaining a first use posture.

The NFU actually challenges a long held nuclear theology of first use. Until now, this has been largely considered the most effective deterrent

posture in service of national security. But, the adoption of NFU by China and India, the two most populous countries of the world that collectively comprise about a third of humanity, has opened up another possibility at the other end of the spectrum. It offers a counterview to the traditional aggressive and arms race generating doctrine of first use. If NFU were to be accepted by all NWS, then the world might find itself on its way to a diminishing salience of nuclear weapons, their delegitimisation, redundancy and eventually their abolition.

CONCLUSION

McNamara wrote in 2005, "I know from direct experience that US nuclear policy today creates unacceptable risks to other nations and to our own."[12] And yet, nuclear first use has been the predominant doctrine over the last six decades that nuclear weapons have been around. Only two countries maintain a no-first-use (NFU) strategy and the general tendency has been to be dismissive of these declarations since it has been believed that it is the threat of first use that establishes credible deterrence. Questioning this conventional wisdom in the face of the current nuclear realities where nearly all nuclear armed states (with the possible exception of North Korea) have a secure second strike capability, this essay explores the value of no-first-use as a meaningful and credible deterrence strategy. Besides, it also offers two other benefits of an NFU. One, since it is premised on communication of threat of punishment, the nature of the required arsenal reduces existential nuclear risks, and by relieving the adversary of a "use or lose" pressure, it enhances strategic stability. Secondly, by de facto making the nuclear weapon unusable, NFU brings down its salience and helps in promotion of non-proliferation and disarmament, thereby making a contribution to international security.

Most nuclear literature tends to be dismissive of the NFU as a declaratory statement. Indeed, given that the USA, the trendsetter of nuclear fashion, has never seriously considered the adoption of NFU, the prolific writings that emanate from the country have largely been devoted to enhancing

12. McNamara, n. 5.

the credibility of deterrence based on first use.[13] The Soviet Union briefly adopted the NFU from 1982 for about a decade but the fact that it gave it up in the face of reduced conventional capability in 1992 led the proponents of first use to further their argument that NFU was a posture that could possibly be adopted only by conventionally superior nuclear armed nations and which could not be sustained in situations where a nuclear armed nation was faced with the prospect of conventional defeat.

This argument, however, ignores or dismisses the fact that the two nations that have consistently adopted a declared NFU doctrine—China and India—have done so at times when both have been conventionally wanting against their perceived adversaries. In the case of China, it announced its NFU doctrine in 1964 at a time when it counted conventionally far superior USA and Russia amongst its adversaries. In the case of India, the NFU was put down as its doctrine in 1999 when China, its declared adversary and the stated reason for its nuclear test, was rapidly undergoing conventional modernisation. Unfortunately, however, nuclear strategists and scholars in neither China nor India have laboured to explain the logic of the NFU as a viable deterrent strategy.[14]

Challenging the current conventional wisdom that tends to favour nuclear first use as a militarily meaningful deterrent strategy, this essay has established the value of NFU on three grounds—for national security, for strategic stability, and for international security premised on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Indeed, a nuclear first use can be hardly an alternative less than hell.

13. To some extent, this can be explained on the basis of the fact that the Americans have crafted their war strategies on the Pearl Harbour experience where acting first and maintaining surprise has been critical. The same has been transposed onto the nuclear field too with Washington maintaining a nuclear first use doctrine and subscribing to a launch on warning and launch under attack force posture. This has been premised on the belief that unless the US was able to undertake a pre-emptive/surprise strike, it stood little chance of being able to destroy all Soviet targets as required by its war plans.
14. China, in fact, has seen greater prudence in maintaining nuclear opacity and ambiguity in its nuclear strategy and hence has never provided any explanations. Meanwhile, India has been engaged in operationalising its nuclear deterrent over the last decade and a half. However, though in both countries there prevails a general consensus in favour of a counterstrike doctrine, one can find rumblings of discontent too especially among the military establishments.