

# Correspondence

Debating India's Pathway  
to Nuclearization

Gaurav Kampani  
Karthika Sasikumar  
Jason Stone  
Andrew B. Kennedy

*To the Editors (Gaurav Kampani writes):*

In his article, Andrew Kennedy attributes India's nuclear restraint from 1964 to 1989 to (1) implicit nuclear umbrellas extended by the two superpowers and (2) the normative beliefs of Indian leaders.<sup>1</sup> Using newly available declassified documents, he argues that India's apparent absence of nuclear balancing against China and Pakistan until the 1980s was a distortion of reality, because the balancing occurred in secret. Its means were implicit nuclear umbrellas, first extended against China in the mid-1960s by both superpowers and then from 1970 to 1991 by the former Soviet Union. As Soviet power in the mid-1980s waned, India resorted to internal balancing by developing an independent nuclear arsenal (pp. 151–152). Kennedy further claims that Indian leaders first sought security through international disarmament institutions. Only when that quest failed did they proceed with nuclear acquisition (pp. 144–146).

In this letter, I argue that there is no credible evidence to support either of the above two theses. Further, neither provides a consistent explanation for Indian nuclear behavior over the period in question. Hence neither qualifies as a general cause for Indian nuclear restraint.

Kennedy's first claim is contradicted by two events: the 1974 Pokhran test and the aborted plan for nuclear tests in 1982–83.<sup>2</sup> The 1974 test came in the wake of the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation. The treaty's key clause was article 9, the security clause, which according to Kennedy formally institutionalized the implicit Soviet nuclear guarantee (pp. 136–140). If the implicit nuclear guarantee was the cause for Indian nuclear dormancy, then the 1974 test is a puzzle that needs explaining all over again. Kennedy further links India's revived nuclear program around 1985–86 to the advent of the Gorbachev regime and the sense among Indian officials that the fidelity of Moscow's implicit nuclear guarantee was waning (pp. 141–144). This claim ignores historical evidence that places the revived Indian nuclear weapons program

---

*Gaurav Kampani is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Government at Cornell University.*

---

*Karthika Sasikumar is Assistant Professor of Political Science at San Jose State University.*

---

*Jason Stone is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science at Indiana University, Bloomington. He extends his sincere thanks to Sumit Ganguly, Anees Gharzita, and Galen Jackson for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this response.*

---

*Andrew B. Kennedy is Senior Lecturer at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University.*

---

1. Andrew B. Kennedy, "India's Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments, and the Bomb," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 120–153. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 242–244; and Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story to India's Quest to be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 257–261.

to 1980–81,<sup>3</sup> years before Mikhail Gorbachev's presidency or any detectable shifts in Soviet commitments.

Kennedy's implicit balancing claim rests on recently declassified documents included in the *Haksar Papers*. These consist of two memos written in 1967 by L.K. Jha, principal secretary to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Jha wrote these memos following trips to Washington, Moscow, London, and Paris, which he made with the intent of securing either a formal superpower- or United Nations-supported multilateral guarantee against potential Chinese nuclear threats (pp. 133–134). Although the superpowers and the great powers were unwilling to make formal commitments, both the United States and the Soviet Union privately assured India of their willingness to counter China. Jha subsequently wrote the prime minister that such implicit commitments would suffice. He reasoned that neither superpower had an interest in countenancing Chinese nuclear coercion and the destruction of the Asian balance of power (p. 134). In his second memo, however, Jha contextualized the reasons for this belief. First, he maintained that India ought not to invest in a nuclear weapons program because of its prohibitive economic cost.<sup>4</sup> Second, he did not foresee large-scale war involving nuclear weapons between the two Himalayan neighbors. China, Jha reasoned, would be more likely to engage in a subversive guerrilla war against India in which nuclear weapons would have no role.<sup>5</sup> What Jha's second memo makes clear is that the economic burdens of developing an independent nuclear capability and the low-key nature of the Chinese threat rendered implicit superpower nuclear guarantees acceptable, not that the guarantees in themselves were sufficient cause for reassurance.

Kennedy's next piece of evidence is the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty, with the security clause as its centerpiece. Nowhere does the security clause allude to nuclear guarantees (pp. 136, 138–139). But even if one accepts an expansive interpretation of this clause, Kennedy's own evidence shows that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was reluctant to conclude the treaty for domestic reasons (p. 136). U.S. fickleness, as demonstrated by President Richard Nixon's decision to seek rapprochement with China, also raises the inevitable question: Why were Indian officials and political leaders confident that the Soviet Union would be a more credible security guarantor? Kennedy's answer for this in part is Soviet support for India during the 1971 Bangladesh war. But even here, as Kennedy points out, Soviet officials made clear that they were not offering a "carte blanche" (p. 139). There is something equally odd about Indian nuclear behavior in this period that undermined the fundamental base condition for an external nuclear guarantee, one that was implicit and by its very nature weak. In his 1967 memo, Jha advised the prime minister that India should not develop an independent nuclear capability, because such an action "would weaken the political compulsions on the USA and the USSR to come to our help" (p. 134). By detonating a nuclear device in 1974 and showcasing its strategic independence, India did precisely that.

Kennedy further argues that Indian leaders exhausted international disarmament institutions before commencing with a weapons program. Indeed, as India revived its

---

3. Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, pp. 246–247; and Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, pp. 226–228, 242–244.

4. L.K. Jha, Prime Minister's Secretariat, "Nuclear Policy," May 3, 1967, pp. 1–2, in P.N. Haksar files, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.

5. *Ibid.*

weapon program in the 1980s, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi seriously explored global disarmament efforts before authorizing weaponization. Gandhi's quest for nuclear restraint within the Indian government, however, was a relatively lonely one. India's nuclear scientists, senior civil servants, and military leaders all favored weaponization.<sup>6</sup> Gandhi did not represent the consensus view within the Indian state. Arguing thus, as Kennedy does, amounts to black boxing the state.

Kennedy also cites India's participation in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) negotiations in the mid-1990s and its reluctance to conduct further nuclear tests as examples that support his liberal normative-institutional argument. The historical evidence is once again clear. India reached a fundamental decision to commence weaponization in the spring of 1989.<sup>7</sup> The CTBT debate had less to do with making India a nuclear weapons power than with what kind of nuclear power it would be.

In sum, implicit umbrellas and international disarmament institutions are at best partial explanations for Indian nuclear restraint. They were not its causal drivers.

—Gaurav Kampani  
Ithaca, New York

*To the Editors (Karthika Sasikumar writes):*

In Andrew Kennedy's account, the collapse of "implicit umbrellas" and "diplomatic disappointments" in the quest for nuclear disarmament best explain India's nuclear decisionmaking.<sup>1</sup> Although his analysis of external factors provides a useful corrective to scholarship that has focused on domestic politics explanations, Kennedy's conclusions from the episodes described in his article are off the mark.

Kennedy sees India's search for security guarantees following China's 1964 nuclear test as a genuine attempt to obtain protection without building its own nuclear arsenal. The way in which India went about seeking a security guarantee, however, challenges this assumption. Indian leaders do not appear to have thought through what such a guarantee would have implied—a compromise in both their ability to pursue an independent foreign policy and their strategic position of equipoise between the superpowers. Moreover, domestic factors at the time did not permit the government to make the concessions that would have made such a guarantee credible.

India did initiate a probe of a security guarantee by the United States, but the government's emissary, L.K. Jha, was unclear about how the guarantee would work in practice.<sup>2</sup> New Delhi had rejected the notion of a formal alliance, which Washington held to be a prerequisite for a security guarantee.<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that India, lacking the

---

6. Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, pp. 292–305; and B.G. Deshmukh, "Keeping the Faith," *Hindustan Times*, September 7, 2006, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1698250/posts>.

7. Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, pp. 332–333.

---

1. Andrew B. Kennedy, "India's Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments, and the Bomb," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 120–153. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. A.G. Noorani, "India's Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 7 (July 1967), p. 500.

3. "Memorandum of Conversation," March 29, 1966, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–*

ties to the United States to make a guarantee credible, could have entrusted its security to such an “implicit umbrella.” Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said as much when she noted in a 1967 speech that the effectiveness of a guarantee would “depend on the vital and national interests of the giver.”<sup>4</sup> Indian diplomats eventually called a halt to the quest for guarantees, citing their commitment to nonalignment.<sup>5</sup> R.K. Nehru wrote at the time that it was “natural” to choose nuclear deterrence rather than give up non-alignment and seek Western protection.<sup>6</sup>

What then was behind calls for a guarantee? During this period, India wanted to remind the international community of the potential for that “natural” choice. In a 1964 radio broadcast, the head of India’s Atomic Energy Commission challenged the world to create a “climate favorable to countries which have the capability of making atomic weapons but have voluntarily refrained from doing so.”<sup>7</sup> An Indian delegate told the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee in 1965, “I must point out the danger that some countries may find it necessary . . . to acquire nuclear weapons if proliferation is allowed to go on.”<sup>8</sup>

Kennedy claims that India found a nuclear umbrella in the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation, only to lose it with the fall of the Soviet Union. It is unlikely, however, that Indian elites took this treaty, which merely precluded parties from entering into military alliances directed against each other and barred them from assisting a third party if the other was targeted, as a security guarantee. Prominent expert K. Subrahmanyam warned that the Soviet Union was not a security guarantor.<sup>9</sup>

Kennedy also contends that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) negotiations were a last-ditch attempt by India “to improve its security through diplomacy” (p. 151). In fact, the decision to participate in the negotiations was taken almost on autopilot, given India’s position at the forefront of all manner of disarmament efforts. When it became apparent that their positions were increasingly distant from the consensus draft, Indian diplomats were disoriented, used as they were to leading a principled opposition to the agenda of the nuclear weapon states (NWS). The chief negotiator then asked the government for political direction as to her delegation’s goals.<sup>10</sup>

The CTBT negotiations in Geneva forced a debate in New Delhi that concluded that the space India occupied between the categories of nuclear and nonnuclear states was shrinking. Perceiving a small window of opportunity in which to move closer to NWS status, India tested its first nuclear weapon in May 1998. Although Kennedy rightly

---

1968: *South Asia*, Vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, n.d.), doc. 308, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxv/zb.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxv/zb.html).

4. Quoted in Shelton L. Williams, *The U.S., India, and the Bomb* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 52.

5. George Bunn, “The Legal Status of U.S. Negative Security Assurances to Non-Nuclear Weapon States,” *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring–Summer 1997), p. 13 n. 27.

6. R.K. Nehru, “The Challenge of the Chinese Bomb,” *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1965), pp. 5–6.

7. Quoted in Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India’s Quest to Be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 94.

8. Quoted in A.K. Chopra, *India’s Policy on Disarmament* (New Delhi: ABC, 1984), p. 154.

9. K. Subrahmanyam, “India’s Security Challenges and Responses: Evolving a Security Doctrine,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (April 1987), pp. 1–12.

10. Author interview with Arundhati Ghose, New Delhi, India, August 1, 2003.

draws attention to the role of the CTBT in renewing the nuclear debate in India, it was not the fading of "hopes for a less discriminatory nuclear order" (p. 149) but the fear of isolation that spurred the tests.

—Karthika Sasikumar  
San Jose, California

*To the Editors (Jason Stone writes):*

In "India's Nuclear Odyssey," Andrew Kennedy argues that implicit security assurances offered by President Lyndon Johnson help to explain India's nuclear restraint between China's first nuclear test of October 1964 and its emergence as a de facto nuclear power in the early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> I critique this argument on two grounds. First, Kennedy misattributes early signs of Indian confidence in superpower backing against Chinese nuclear aggression to Johnson's statements, while ignoring the veritable silence these assurances elicited from the Indian government. Second, Kennedy drastically understates the extent to which U.S. conduct during the Indo-Pakistani conflicts of 1965 undermined India's confidence in superpower support in the event of a confrontation with China.

#### INITIAL (NON)REACTIONS TO JOHNSON'S ASSURANCES

Citing statements by Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Defense Minister Y.B. Chavan in October and November 1964, Kennedy states that "[top] Indian leaders took Johnson's implicit assurances seriously" (p. 129). These statements are worth examining. On October 25, when Chavan was asked if India would seek shelter under a U.S. nuclear umbrella, he answered, "There is no question of asking for such a thing. In the present day world, if a country attacks another country with a nuclear bomb, it will also receive one." One week later, Shastri claimed that "China alone could not do much damage to India or her position, for any kind of atomic war might become global." Chavan echoed Shastri's statements, adding, "If such a war were to break out, we have friends to support us," naming the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union as those who would "stand behind" India.<sup>2</sup>

There are two problems with attributing any initial confidence the Indian leadership may have had in superpower backing to Johnson's assurances. First, Johnson's statements cannot explain Chavan's apparent confidence in British and Soviet support in the event of Chinese nuclear aggression.<sup>3</sup> Second, Shastri's statements were not unique. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who died five months prior to China's

---

1. Andrew B. Kennedy, "India's Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments, and the Bomb," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 120–153. Subsequent references to Kennedy's article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. Quoted in A.G. Noorani, "India's Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 7 (July 1967), pp. 490–491.

3. The same problem arises when Kennedy cites a December 1964 study conducted by the Indian military, which concluded that "the U.S. and UK, and probably the USSR could be counted upon for effective retaliatory action" in the event of a Chinese nuclear attack (p. 129). Department of the Air Force Staff Message Branch, "Incoming Message," December 7, 1964 (accessed online through the Declassified Document Reference System [DDRS], January 7, 2012).

nuclear test, had made nearly identical statements as early as October 1961, saying, "I do not myself conceive of any major nuclear effort against India by China. Any such thing would mean a world war."<sup>4</sup> Nehru did not base his statements on superpower assurances to defend India in the event of a nuclear attack, but on his belief that a secure India was vital to the U.S.-Soviet goal of maintaining a stable order in Asia.<sup>5</sup> Given Nehru's unquestioned dominance of Indian foreign policy during his seventeen-year tenure as prime minister and the impact his views had on much of India's political establishment, it is not surprising that his successor—a quintessential political neophyte who had never even been abroad prior to assuming office—might have initially relied on Nehruvian conceptualizations of India's security environment when presented with his first significant foreign policy challenge. Although Shastri and Chavan may have initially felt (like Nehru) that India was "protected by the balance of power,"<sup>6</sup> this was unlikely the result of Johnson's assurances.

Kennedy additionally quotes from a declassified Central Intelligence Agency cable written eight days after China's nuclear test, stating that "U.S. intelligence reported that Indian leaders were 'relying on President Johnson's assurances to come to the aid of any nation menaced by China'" (p. 129). Yet, the sentences immediately preceding this clause in the document are crucial. The document states, "India does not plan to commence work on the bomb as yet because the GOI [Government of India] is convinced the Chicoms [Chinese communists] will not have an offensive nuclear capability for at least five years. In the meantime, should the situation change, India is relying on President Johnson's assurances[.]"<sup>7</sup> By quoting only the last clause, Kennedy lends an air of immediacy to Indian reliance on Johnson's statements that did not exist, while ignoring additional factors that influenced India's nuclear decisionmaking.

If India was relying on Johnson's assurances, it is puzzling that these statements elicited so little positive response from Indian officials. In early November 1964, Indian Ambassador B.K. Nehru questioned the reliability of U.S. assurances, noting, "[T]he United States would not come to our aid by attacking China if at the same time the Soviet Union said that it would assist China under such an attack."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Johnson's statements appear to have generated little discussion within the Indian government. In December, Undersecretary of State George Ball cabled the U.S. embassy in New Delhi seeking an explanation for Shastri's not "tak[ing] any initiative to explore [the] subject" of U.S. assurances with his government.<sup>9</sup> Although U.S. Ambassador to

---

4. Quoted in G.G. Mirchandani, *India's Nuclear Dilemma* (New York: Humanities, 1968), p. 22.

5. Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 22–31; Ashok Kapur, "Peace and Power in India's Nuclear Policy," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 9 (September 1970), pp. 779–788; and Steven A. Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 48–50.

6. Ashok Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond: India's Nuclear Behaviour* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 81.

7. "Central Intelligence Agency, Subject: Indian Government Policy on Development of Nuclear Weapon, October 24, 1964," in Jeffrey Richelson, ed., *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 187 (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, George Washington University, n.d.), doc. 5, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB187/index.htm>.

8. "Memorandum of Conversation," November 3, 1964, in *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS]: 1964–1968*, Vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000), item 74. All subsequent FRUS items are found in this volume and are available at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v25>.

9. "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in India," December 12, 1964, in FRUS, item 79.

India Chester Bowles discouraged further action, given that Indian leaders were "aware" of Johnson's statements,<sup>10</sup> Washington sent Bowles and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Averell Harriman to reassure Shastri that Johnson's statements did apply to India. In a memo to Harriman just prior to his trip in March 1965, Secretary of State Dean Rusk noted that the "Indians seem to have done some thinking about assurances but still seem to have no firm idea what would best meet their needs. [The Government of India] has never directly raised question of security assurances with us, nor has it to our knowledge reacted to President's statements of October 16 and 18, 1964."<sup>11</sup> When Harriman raised the issue with Shastri, the prime minister reiterated India's commitment to nonproliferation. Yet, because it was unwise for India to seek a nuclear umbrella solely for itself given its nonaligned status, Shastri said it was up to the major nuclear powers to reassure all nonnuclear states that they would be defended from a nuclear-armed China.<sup>12</sup> Throughout 1965, however, U.S. diplomacy only undermined the credibility of its security assurances, including those pertaining to potential Chinese nuclear aggression.

#### THE EROSION OF CONFIDENCE IN U.S. SECURITY ASSURANCES

Kennedy argues that the U.S. failure to prevent Pakistan's use of U.S.-supplied armaments against India in the Rann of Kutch conflict and its suspension of military aid to India in the first half of 1965 "may have begun to erode Indian confidence in implicit American support" (p. 132). This is a dramatic understatement. In a rather heated exchange with Secretary Rusk, Ambassador Nehru cited U.S. assurances that Pakistan would not be permitted to use American-supplied armaments against India as the foundation of Indian defense policy, warning that any erosion of the government's confidence in such assurances would be a grave matter. Rusk insisted that the reliability of U.S. assurances would be proven by the ability of the United States to secure a cease-fire and end the conflict, saying that if the problem of U.S. arms came up again, it would be dealt with "at that time." This was insufficient for Nehru, as it provided no assurance regarding any future conflict with Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> Two days later, Ambassador Bowles warned Rusk, "As long as we describe ourselves as an ally of Pakistan [India] will not henceforth trust our guaranties. . . . [This] lack of confidence may lead them into costly and foolhardy guns ahead of butter approach with possibility of decision to proceed with nuclear explosion[.]"<sup>14</sup> Rather than cutting off military aid to Pakistan as

---

10. "Telegram from the Ambassador to India (Bowles) to Robert Komer of the National Security Council Staff," January 8, 1965, in *FRUS*, item 83.

11. "State Department Telegram for Governor Harriman from the Secretary, February 27, 1965 (SECRET)," in Joyce Battle, ed., *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, George Washington University, n.d.), doc. 7, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB6/index.html>.

12. "Telegram from the Embassy in India to the Department of State," March 5, 1965, in *FRUS*, item 91; and "Telegram from the Embassy in the Philippines to the Department of State," March 7, 1965, in *ibid.*, item 92.

13. "Memorandum of Conversation," May 8, 1965, in *ibid.*, item 117. Although Nehru reportedly said that "U.S. assurances to India had been the foundation of Indian defense policy," he was not referring to Johnson's statements of October 1964. In a later meeting with Johnson, Nehru stated that "India had based its whole defense policy on US assurances that it would not permit Pakistan to use US arms against India." "Memorandum for the Record," September 9, 1965, in *ibid.*, item 195.

14. "Telegram from the Embassy in India to the Department of State," May 10, 1965, in *ibid.*, item 119.

Nehru requested, however, the United States suspended military aid to both sides in an effort to convey neutrality.<sup>15</sup>

From the outset of the subsequent Indo-Pakistan war, Indian leaders worried over the prospect of China opening a second front, and sought assurance of U.S. support in such an event. On September 9, 1965, Ambassador Nehru met directly with President Johnson and, after noting that the United States had once again failed to prevent Pakistan's use of American-supplied armaments, asked what the United States would do if China entered the war. Johnson's reply was hardly reassuring. He stated that the question was "giving us gray hairs right now," emphasizing the need to put "all our chips behind [United Nations Secretary-General] U Thant" to negotiate a cease-fire.<sup>16</sup> When Indian President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan repeated Nehru's question to Ambassador Bowles two days later, Bowles wavered, saying that U.S. actions would "depend on conditions existing at that time," and that although the United States did not want to see the Chinese overrun any part of India, it "obviously had no desire to underwrite total war on the subcontinent."<sup>17</sup>

Although China's veiled threat to enter the war on September 16 drew warnings from both the United States and the Soviet Union not to intervene (p. 132), the conduct of both superpowers throughout the conflicts of 1965 profoundly undermined India's confidence that it could count on superpower security assurances. Following an October meeting with Shastri's principal secretary, L.K. Jha, Bowles remarked that Indian leaders felt "that a unilateral US commitment is insufficient" and were "at the moment doubtful of all assurances which fail to specify exactly how they will be carried out."<sup>18</sup> That same month, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) noted:

[T]he Indian Government has had little success in finding non-nuclear ways to deal with the threat which Chinese nuclear developments pose to its prestige and security. . . . Nor have guarantees satisfactory to India been forthcoming from the nuclear powers that they would come to India's assistance in the event of a nuclear attack by Communist China. . . . Moscow's . . . passivity following Peking's ultimatum during the recent conflict with Pakistan, the suspension of US military aid to India and the US failure to prevent Pakistan's use of US weapons against India are all cited as proof that India cannot depend upon outside powers for protection in the great variety of contingencies it will face.<sup>19</sup>

---

15. George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 107.

16. "Memorandum for the Record," September 9, 1965, in *FRUS*, item 195.

17. "Telegram from the Embassy in India to the Department of State," September 11, 1965, in *ibid.*, item 201.

18. "India's Position on Developing Nuclear Weapons Discussed by Amb. Bowles," Department of State cable, October 19, 1965 (accessed online through DDRS, January 7, 2012). Jha seems to have changed his mind by April 1967, reportedly describing Johnson's 1964 statements as "a real deterrent," while noting that they should be "improved" by a joint U.S.-Soviet assurance. Whether Jha's views represented those of his government is unclear. "Memorandum of Conversation from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense: 'Meeting between the Secretary of Defense and Mr. L.K. Jha, Tuesday, 18 April at 10 A.M.,' April 27, 1967 (SECRET)," in Battle, *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 6, doc. 15, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB6/index.html>.

19. "Director of Central Intelligence, SNIE 31-1-65, *India's Nuclear Weapons Policy*, October 21, 1965 (Secret)," in Richelson, *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 187, doc. 9, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB187/index.htm>.



Shortly after Indira Gandhi became prime minister in January 1966, a study conducted by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded, "From the Indian viewpoint . . . the chances for major power intervention in small but persistent Chinese thrusts against India's borders do not appear good. The Indians probably could not hope to engage great power deterrents for the type of progressive erosion of their position that nuclear blackmail implies."<sup>20</sup> Although the study was "highly speculative," the Johnson administration acknowledged India's skepticism, struggling to determine both how far the United States was willing to go to protect India, and how it could "bolster the credibility of private security assurances to India."<sup>21</sup> Although the administration would ultimately pursue the issue of security assurances to nonnuclear states within the context of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty negotiations, its attempts to provide satisfactory private assurances to India were all but abandoned.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, there is little evidence to suggest that U.S. security assurances bore any appreciable responsibility for India's nuclear restraint. Rather, the failure of the United States to make credible commitments to Indian leaders serves as a reminder that implicit guarantees, regardless of their strength, can always be eroded by imprudent diplomacy.<sup>23</sup>

—Jason Stone  
Bloomington, Indiana

### *Andrew B. Kennedy Replies:*

I am pleased that my article on India's "nuclear odyssey" has generated so much interest and discussion.<sup>1</sup> Let me reply to each of the letters in turn.

Gaurav Kampani begins by mischaracterizing my article in two ways. First, he writes that I attribute India's post-1964 nuclear restraint in part to the "normative beliefs" of Indian leaders. This is untrue. I stress that Indian leaders tried to constrain their adver-

---

20. "Thomas Hughes' Report on the Specific Dangers Involved Should India Decide to Develop Nuclear Weapons," U.S. Department of State Memorandum, director of intelligence and research, February 28, 1966 (accessed online through DDRS, January 7, 2012).

21. "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson," August 1, 1966, in *FRUS*, item 363; Department of State, "Incoming Telegram," May 17, 1966 (accessed online through DDRS, January 7, 2012); "State Department Memorandum for the President, 'NSC Meeting, June 9, 1966,' June 7, 1966 (SECRET)," in Battle, *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 6, doc. 10, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB6/index.html>; "National Security Action Memorandum No. 351," June 10, 1966, in *FRUS*, item 347; "Telegram from the Embassy in India to the Department of State," June 15, 1966, in *ibid.*, item 351; and "Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson," July 25, 1966, in *ibid.*, item 359.

22. Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, pp. 125–145.

23. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 52.

---

1. Andrew B. Kennedy, "India's Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments, and the Bomb," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 120–153. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

saries through international institutions out of a desire to enhance their security, not for normative reasons. Second, he states that my argument is that Indian leaders restrained their nuclear program only because of implicit umbrellas and diplomatic initiatives. This is also untrue. As the article states, my goal was not to deny that other factors (such as domestic political change or economic constraints) played a role in the Indian case, but to highlight strategic considerations that had previously been neglected (p. 122).

Kampani's main criticism focuses on my argument that Indian nuclear restraint was informed by implicit external support. With respect to the 1960s, he suggests that memos from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's principal secretary, L.K. Jha, do not support my argument because Jha stressed that developing nuclear weapons would be a great economic burden for India. My article notes that Jha worried that nuclear weapons would be "extremely costly," so I clearly agree that economic constraints influenced his thinking (p. 134). This is consistent with my view, articulated in the article and reiterated above, that multiple factors informed Indian restraint. By suggesting that I believe otherwise, Kampani is rebutting an argument that I did not make. Kampani also emphasizes that Jha was not overly worried about a Chinese nuclear attack on India. As I wrote, this was partly because Jha believed that Beijing recognized India's implicit support from the superpowers. In other words, his optimism was not independent of India's external support, as Kampani implies.

Kampani also questions my claim that India relied on implicit support from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. He suggests that India's 1974 nuclear test and its near tests in the early 1980s contradict the idea that India relied on Soviet support. Yet he omits the most important point: India did not develop nuclear weapons after the 1974 test or in the early 1980s. My article suggests that the 1974 explosion reflected an impulse to become more independent, but notes that Indira Gandhi ultimately chose to remain reliant on Moscow (p. 140). In short, I argue that India relied on external support, not that Indian leaders did not explore other options. Kampani also notes that the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty failed to mention nuclear guarantees. Of course it did not mention such guarantees—my argument is that the Soviet umbrella was implicit, not explicit, and security treaties do not normally refer to the threat of nuclear attack in any case. Kampani also asks why India conducted its 1974 test, when Jha had warned in 1967 that developing nuclear weapons might reduce India's external support. It is impossible to say with certainty given the available evidence, but it must be stressed that Indo-Soviet ties developed considerably between 1967 and 1974, and that India did not actually develop nuclear weapons at this time. Indira Gandhi may well have believed that the test would not seriously jeopardize New Delhi's ties with Moscow.

Kampani also questions the extent to which India relied on nuclear diplomacy. He grants that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi "seriously explored global disarmament efforts," but states that the prime minister's stance was "a relatively lonely one." Lonely or not, it was the prime minister who mattered. India's initiatives in nuclear diplomacy proceeded because the prime minister supported them, notwithstanding the doubts of others. India developed a *de facto* nuclear arsenal in the late 1980s, and not earlier, because that is when the prime minister decided one was necessary.<sup>2</sup> In short, Kampani fails to explain why focusing on the prime minister is inappropriate in this case.

With respect to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Kampani does not ap-

---

2. Kampani writes that India's nuclear program was revived in 1980–81, but the critical decision

pear to disagree with what I have written. My article emphasizes that India became a de facto nuclear power in the late 1980s and notes that the choice New Delhi faced in the 1990s was whether and how to develop its capability further (pp. 146–148). If Kampani is suggesting that the CTBT talks are irrelevant to my article because India was already a nuclear power in some sense when they occurred, I disagree. India was still wrestling with different means of enhancing its security in the 1990s. Indeed, as I suggest in the conclusion of my article, India continues to grapple with questions of nuclear diplomacy and nuclear armament today.

Karthika Sasikumar critiques my article on four grounds. First, she questions whether India's search for an explicit nuclear "guarantee" in the 1960s was designed to enhance its security. My article is more concerned, however, with documenting Indian perceptions of implicit external support than with trying to ascertain the motivations behind its search for an explicit guarantee. To the extent that I do address the latter, Sasikumar has misrepresented what I have written. In particular, I note that Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's search for an explicit guarantee may have sought to strengthen India's implicit support, or it may have aimed to reduce the pressure he was feeling at home to invest in a nuclear arsenal (p. 131). In the latter case, it was not an attempt to enhance Indian security but an effort to influence domestic Indian politics. Sasikumar suggests that India's search for an explicit guarantee was designed to remind the world of the country's potential to become a nuclear power. This explanation hardly excludes the possibility that it aimed to enhance Indian security, however. In fact, reminding the world of India's nuclear potential would seem a natural way to underscore the importance of its security concerns.

Second, Sasikumar opines that it is "unlikely" that India could have relied on an implicit U.S. umbrella in the 1960s. The evidence presented in the article, however, shows that a range of Indian officials did perceive implicit external support against China—not only from the United States, but also from the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. Indeed, the question is not whether Indo-U.S. ties were strong enough, as Sasikumar suggests, but whether the U.S. interest in containing China was strong enough. Sasikumar quotes Indira Gandhi to suggest that there was some uncertainty with respect to this question in 1967. Yet Gandhi's statement was hardly proof that she was averse to relying on implicit external support. In fact, a more extended summary of Gandhi's remarks shows that she proceeded to welcome President Lyndon Johnson's unilateral offer to protect nonnuclear powers against China—an odd thing to do if she saw no value in such an offer.<sup>3</sup> Her subsequent decision to conclude the Indo-Soviet treaty in 1971 is also difficult to reconcile with the notion that she saw no value in implicit external support.

Third, Sasikumar contends that it is "unlikely" that Indian elites took the Indo-Soviet treaty seriously as a security measure. She writes that the treaty "merely precluded parties from entering into military alliances directed against each other and barred them from assisting a third party if the other was targeted." This is inaccurate. Article 9 of the treaty stated that if either party was "subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the

---

to build a nuclear arsenal was made in the late 1980s—a point he recognizes in his penultimate paragraph.

3. "India," *Asian Recorder*, Vol. 13, No. 31 (July/August 1967), p. 7833.

security of their countries.”<sup>4</sup> Although the treaty was not a full-blown defense pact, Sasikumar’s belief that Article 9 left Indian elites unimpressed is contradicted by the evidence. T.N. Kaul, India’s foreign secretary at the time, argued that Article 9 would be “important” in the event of a conflict with China or Pakistan and that it would act as a “deterrent” on both (p. 138). He even suggested that the mutual consultations were not “mere consultations but intended to provide appropriate effective measures even in the case of a threat of an attack.”<sup>5</sup> My interview with Romesh Bhandari, who served at the Indian embassy in Moscow from 1969 to 1971, indicates that knowledgeable Indian diplomats who worked under Kaul believed that Soviet support against the Chinese nuclear threat was implicit in Article 9. By focusing on the treaty language, rather than on the perceptions of policymakers, Sasikumar has missed Thomas Schelling’s basic point that strategic commitments are often implicit.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, Sasikumar does explore Indian perceptions by citing an article by K. Subrahmanyam. Yet her summary is misleading: Subrahmanyam wrote that the Indo-Soviet treaty was useful for creating “countervailing strategic uncertainties for major powers like the U.S. and China” but that it was not a “security guarantor vis-à-vis Pakistan.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, he still saw considerable strategic value in the Indo-Soviet relationship. Subrahmanyam’s concern about Soviet support vis-à-vis Pakistan is unsurprising given that his article was published in 1987. In late 1986, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had visited New Delhi and failed to offer unconditional support against Pakistan, as noted in my article.

Fourth, Sasikumar claims that India’s leaders took the decision to participate in the CTBT talks on “autopilot” and that the decision was not informed by a belief that India might be able to improve its security through the talks. She offers no specific evidence to support this point, though she does cite an interview with Arundhati Ghose at the end of the paragraph. If Ghose is the source for her claim, it must be noted that Ghose joined India’s delegation only in mid-1995, and she was not involved in India’s decision to join the CTBT talks when they began in 1994. I interviewed J.N. Dixit, the Indian foreign secretary from 1991 to 1994, and he was clearly not operating on autopilot with respect to nuclear diplomacy. Dixit had reasons for believing that India might be able to enhance its security through the CTBT talks, and he helped to organize an informal experts committee on nuclear technology and was briefed on its discussions while in office, as noted in the article (pp. 147–148). Not all Indian officials shared Dixit’s views, of course, but that does not mean that India became involved in the CTBT talks without considering its position.

Sasikumar concludes by suggesting that it was a “fear of isolation” generated by the CTBT talks that spurred India’s tests in 1998. It is not clear how much we disagree here. I argue that, starting in 1995, key Indian officials saw the CTBT talks as helping to maintain a discriminatory nuclear regime, with India suffering second-class status. With no diplomatic rationale for restraint, Indian prime ministers beginning with

---

4. A.G. Noorani, *Brezhnev Plan for Asian Security: Russia in Asia* (Mumbai: Jaico, 1975), pp. 405–409.

5. T.N. Kaul, “Points for Consideration by PM and FM,” August 3, 1971, in P.N. Haksar Files, installment II, subfile no. 49, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi, India, p. 5.

6. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 52.

7. K. Subrahmanyam, “India’s Security Challenges and Responses: Evolving a Security Doctrine,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (April 1987), p. 4.

Narasimha Rao verged on testing, but they were deterred until 1998 by the potential consequences for the Indian economy. Sasikumar seems to disagree that India ever had a diplomatic rationale for restraint, as noted above. But to the extent that her point is that India did not wish to be relegated to second-class status in the emerging nuclear order, we agree.

With regard to Jason Stone, I agree that Indian leaders perceived substantial implicit support from external powers against China in 1964. He argues, however, that Indian perceptions of such support were unrelated to the assurances offered by President Johnson in October of that year. In his view, Indian perceptions of external support reflected beliefs that the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union wished to maintain a stable balance of power in Asia. Stone has misunderstood my argument. In particular, he has confused Indian confidence in Johnson's assurances with the reasons for this confidence. Nowhere do I argue that Indian leaders were confident of U.S. support simply because of the statements that Johnson made. Instead, as I emphasize in the conclusion, I believe that Indian leaders took these statements seriously because of their perception of U.S. interests and capabilities. In that way, Stone's letter actually reinforces a key point made in the article.

In this context, Stone's more specific arguments on this point are easily addressed. He notes that Indian leaders perceived support from the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, as well as the United States, even though London and Moscow did not offer the same kind of assurances. This is an interesting point: while Indian perceptions of external support were focused primarily on the United States at this time, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were mentioned as potential supporters against China as well. Stone further suggests that Indian leaders perceived implicit external support against the emerging Chinese nuclear threat as early as 1961, well before Johnson made his assurances.<sup>8</sup> Let me be clear: I did not argue that Johnson's assurances were critical to generating Indian confidence, merely that they were taken seriously after they were made. To be sure, Stone notes that the assurances elicited little in the way of a positive response from Indian leaders, but I do not find this puzzling. Indian leaders were relatively confident of U.S. support in late 1964, and they wished to preserve their nonaligned stance. An enthusiastic embrace of unilateral U.S. assurances would have undermined this goal.

Stone also argues that I should have drawn more extensively on a Central Intelligence Agency cable that was written days after China's test in October 1964. The cable states that the government of India was convinced that China would not have an offensive nuclear capability for at least five years. It is odd that Stone gives such weight to the CIA's early assessment of Indian threat perceptions when he disagrees with its assertion that India was relying on President Johnson's assurances "should the situation change." As it turned out, the CIA's assessment of Indian threat perceptions was inaccurate. India's leaders did not leap to conclusions about the Chinese nuclear threat but instead asked the military to assess the situation. The ensuing report concluded that

---

8. In fact, the United States conveyed an interest in supporting India against China in 1959, but I have argued elsewhere that external support was not the key consideration in Nehru's nuclear decisionmaking. See Andrew Bingham Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 214.

China would have a limited capability to employ nuclear weapons against India in the near term, with the most likely targets being populous northern cities such as Calcutta (p. 125). I do not wish to exaggerate India's concerns, but the notion that no Chinese nuclear threat was perceived in the near term is unfounded.

Stone's second line of critique concerns the erosion of Indian confidence in U.S. support following the 1965 India-Pakistan war. He cites a conversation between President Johnson and Indian Ambassador B.K. Nehru in which Nehru asked how the United States would respond to a Chinese intervention. Stone does not mention that Johnson said his "gray hairs" were the result of worrying about what the Chinese might do, that Johnson was determined to keep Pakistan from drawing China into the conflict, and that Johnson warned Nehru that a stronger statement from the United States about the Chinese threat might actually provoke China.<sup>9</sup> It was hardly as one-sided a conversation as Stone suggests. Stone also cites more persuasive evidence of Indian concerns, specifically U.S. Ambassador Chester Bowles's report on a meeting that Bowles had with Prime Minister Shastri's principal secretary, L.K. Jha. Whereas Stone presents this evidence as a revelation, my article already notes that "high-level Indian officials expressed doubts about U.S. support against the Chinese nuclear threat" when speaking with Ambassador Bowles in the fall of 1965 (p. 132). My article goes on to note that Indian officials continued to express doubts in 1966 and 1967. Stone's claim that I understate Indian concerns is thus unwarranted.

Indeed, Stone has arguably overstated the depth of Indian concerns by not putting them in context. By 1967, Jha was writing that a Chinese nuclear attack on India in the near future would be met with "the strongest possible action" from both the United States and the Soviet Union (p. 133). Subsequently, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger's disclosure to Jha about the limits of U.S. support for India in 1971 had a profound impact in New Delhi, prompting Kaul to write that India now needed to turn to Moscow so that it would have "a reliable friend in case of necessity" (p. 138). I agree that implicit umbrellas can be eroded—in the conclusion, I note just how readily that can occur—but it would be wrong to suggest that Indian confidence in U.S. support disappeared after 1965.

In the future, I hope that scholars will focus less attention on whether India relied on implicit nuclear umbrellas from the 1960s to the 1980s—it did—and more on the broader questions raised by my article. Schelling's concept of implicit strategic commitments is one, in particular, that scholars of varying theoretical orientations could profitably explore. Indeed, I hope that my article will not only shed light on India's nuclear odyssey, but also spark wider conversations as well.

—Andrew B. Kennedy  
Canberra, Australia

---

9. "Memorandum for the Record," September 9, 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1964–1968*, Vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000), pp. 373–375.