

# India and the World: A Personal Perspective by Mohamed ElBaradei

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The present article reports on the lecture 'India and the World: A Personal Perspective' by Dr Mohamed ElBaradei, Former Director-General, International Atomic Energy Agency, on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's independence. The session was chaired by Ambassador Shyam Saran, and organised by the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi on 14 June 2022.

Baradei's remarks were personal reflections about a country he admires, a valued culture and cherished friends. He was fascinated growing up by Mahatma Gandhi, a frail, thinly clad man who was able, through non-violent resistance, to wrench his country's independence from the colonial British raj and his enormous influence on millions across the globe craving for freedom and equality.

During his diplomatic career, he forged long, close and wide-ranging associations with India and its people and culture, including diplomats, scientists, scholars, business people, artists, policy makers, and leaders. He interacted with outstanding counterparts in India's Atomic Energy Commission, and with Sundeep Waslekar on the Normandy Manifesto of World Peace. He appreciated Nehru's vision of a modern India: secularism, nonviolence; parliamentary democracy; national unity within diversity; socialism and economic self-reliance; and emphasis on science and technology. Baradei believed that some of the "things of the greatest value" that India could bring to humanity today, at a time, when the global order is challenged and upended, are centred in three key areas: peace and, security; governance and democracy; and economic and social development.

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Nehru, in line with Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, was an early advocate of nuclear disarmament. In 1954 he was the first to call for a halt to nuclear testing. In 1962, at an Anti-Nuclear Arms Convention Conference in New Delhi, he reflected on the difficulty and complexity of nuclear disarmament. Nehru understood that nuclear weapons were "part of a larger war" requiring something deeper: "the minds and hearts of men and the spirit of a man rising to somewhat higher levels". But he was pragmatic enough to recognise that "before war goes, we must have full disarmament. All these things are connected."

In June 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi presented to the United Nations General assembly a bold and comprehensive "Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon Free and Nonviolent World Order," which sought a universal, comprehensive, and legally binding commitment to a staged elimination of nuclear weapons within a defined time frame (2010 at the latest) and the establishment of a "comprehensive global security system firmly based on non-violence." In his speech, Rajiv Gandhi was extremely critical of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. He described it as an "ultimate expression of the philosophy of terrorism, holding humanity hostage to the presumed security needs of a few."

Much water has gone under the bridge since then, notably India's development of nuclear weapons in 1998. This was due, Baradei says, to a number of global and regional geopolitical considerations, including the stagnant nature of nuclear disarmament and the restrictive nuclear trade policy it faced as a non-NPT party. India remains today a non-member of the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), but in 2008 it was granted access to civilian nuclear technology and fuel through a "waiver" exempting it from NSG rules. Baradei had

supported the waiver as Director General of the IAEA, considering India's energy needs and the importance of nuclear safety and international cooperation.

Sadly the prospect for nuclear disarmament does not look bright. A quarter of a century after the end of the cold war, we still have a little under 13000 nuclear weapons in existence, with around 2000 of them on high alert. In addition, most, if not all, the nine nuclear-armed states- the five NPT states (China, France, Russia, UK, US) plus India, Israel, Pakistan and DPRK- are in a race to modernise their arsenals. More ominously, many are developing so-called tactical "usable" nuclear weapons and availing themselves of new cyber and artificial-intelligence technologies, as well as advanced "sci-fi" hypersonic missiles that could trigger a nuclear catastrophe at a speed we cannot even imagine. All this, of course, increases the danger of a nuclear weapon launch, whether intentionally, accidentally, as a result of cyber manipulation or simply as an "act of madness", as president J.F. Kennedy feared. One of the most disturbing developments of the Ukraine war has been the reintroduction of nuclear weapons as a central component of geopolitics, shifting the possible use of nuclear weapons from an unthinkable nightmare to a terrifying prospect.

Given India's long history of serious commitment to a world free from nuclear weapons, Baradei says it still shoulders a certain moral responsibility to lead the charge among the nuclear-armed states and across the world towards nuclear disarmament. India should demonstrate through tangible measures that its acquisition of nuclear weapons was an "interim step", not a permanent policy and that its ultimate commitment to a world free from nuclear weapons remains unwavering. As Nehru and Rajiv Gandhi

pointed out, however, this should be linked to and in parallel with an effort to establish a new global security architecture based on nonviolence.

Baradei said that the global security architecture is in disarray. International relations have become much more “weaponised” than before. The Security Council, entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, has become pitifully impotent. Ukraine again is the latest tragic case in point. The global order has become paralysed and polarised; and our world remains marred by poverty, violence, repression and obscene inequality. Over 700 million people live in extreme poverty, with nearly half the world’s population struggling to meet basic needs, and it is getting worse. Brutal repression and denial of human dignity are hallmarks of one-third of the world’s nations.

The world spends less than one per cent of what we spend on armament (\$2 trillion) on humanitarian assistance. Inequality even extends to a cardinal human value, the sanctity of life. This was recently laid bare by COVID-19, the Ukraine war, and the treatment of refugees. 83 per cent of people in the EU/EEA have been fully vaccinated, but only 15 per cent of people in Africa have. The world is strongly reacting, as it should, to the war in Ukraine, but it had mostly limited itself to hand-wringing when hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed or died from hunger in Syria, Yemen, Somalia and other places. While refugees from Ukraine are met with open arms as “one of us”, those from Africa and Asia are escaping death and persecution and are left to drown or placed in appalling detention camps! One often repeats the mantra that we should “build back better.” Baradei called for building a completely new global peace and security structure based on freedom, equity, and nonviolence.

Many people, himself included, look to India’s active contribution to this field.

Turning to governance and democracy, Baradei says that India, as the largest pluralistic and secular democracy in the world, has always been the proverbial answer to the skeptics who question whether democracy can work in a developing country and if it is compatible with poverty, illiteracy and other challenges. There is often a philosophical comparison between the “Indian model” and the “Chinese model”; specifically, whether one ought to prioritise economic and social rights or whether human development and human dignity should be approached as an indivisible whole, including civil and political rights. Countries that opted for a democratic system are aware that democracy is not “one size fits all”, nor is it instant coffee. It is the product of each country’s historical, social and political evolution. Democracy is always a work in progress in terms of its culture, institutions and modalities. It has its flaws and is often slow and messy. And as we know, it is fragile and vulnerable to manipulation and abuse.

But with all these caveats, Baradei said that a democratic system is still the best political system humanity has come up with; it is aligned with people’s innate aspiration for freedom, dignity, and equality. It is anchored in transparency and accountability; It advocates for inclusiveness, diversity and equity and, through an independent judicial system, protects the minority from the tyranny of a majoritarian rule, be it national, religious, ethnic or ideological. These are all key values for long-term social cohesion and stability, more so in a country like India with such a diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background.

Baradei notes that democracy is under vicious attack by populism and

authoritarianism due to the failure of many democracies to deliver on people's growing economic and social expectations, a failure coupled in many places with gross economic and social inequality. Here also he believed that India, as a primus inter pares of democracies in the global south, has a moral calling to show the world that democracy and economic and social development are not only compatible but also reinforce each other; and that the challenges to democracy should be met with more democracy not less.

Baradei notes that India still faces huge economic and social challenges despite recent strides. A few years back, he had a discussion with Amartya Sen, who explained that the three key elements that contributed most to economic and social development in countries with varied political systems, such as Singapore and Japan, were quality education, a good healthcare system and policies of social tolerance. India has given special attention to education ever since

Independence, although there are still many unfulfilled expectations. One of the farsighted decisions was the establishment of first-class scientific, educational institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, some 23 of them located across the country. They were rightfully named "Institutes of National Importance" by an act of parliament in 1961. When one looks at the number of CEOs of major US tech companies of Indian origin, one realises how forward thinking India was at a time when the term "information technology" was barely known.

Information Technology in India accounted for 8 per cent of India's GDP in 2020. With technology considered the Fourth Industrial Revolution and AI and super computers the future, India is well placed in the field of science and technology

to establish itself as an important hub and a mecca for the global south. It has many comparative advantages. In the health sector, the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, has become, for the last three years, the principal supplier of affordable COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries and one of the backbones of efforts by WHO and others to cope with vaccine "Apartheid" and protect the health of the poor; this is something India should be proud of and build upon.

Referring to India's foreign policy, he says India should remain a major voice for the global south. During the cold war, India was a champion of the non-aligned movement. It took part in the 1955 Bandung Conference. This was the precursor of the establishment in 1961 of the Non Aligned Movement through the initiative of Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, Ghana and Indonesia. Although the movement now has 120 members, it has lost much of its clout and luster. Since 2003 India has been a founding member of the IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, South Africa), established as a tripartite grouping of important democracies of the south to promote South-South cooperation. And since 2010, India has been a member of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as the world's five leading emerging market economies. Last year India also joined the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue QUAD with Australia, Japan and the US. QUAD commits itself to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-pacific region and is regarded by many as an effort to counterbalance China's role and influence in the region. The global order is changing fast. The bipolar world has "expired" and is morphing into a multipolar one whose shape and precise constellation are still not defined. India, given its size, culture, demographics and economic clout, will

certainly be one of the principal players.

There are a number of questions on people's minds related to India's foreign policy that, no doubt, will be clarified along the way; is India going to be aligned with any of the existing poles as being a member of QUAD and a participant in military exercises with the US and its regional allies might imply? Is India going to maintain its long-held independence as its vote in the UN on the Russia- Ukraine war suggests? And if so, what are the basic principles, values and laws that are going to inform its policy choices, and how will it strike the delicate balance between its basic values and national interests? While it is often tempting for states to look at their short- term national interests, it is essential not to lose sight of the long- term pillars of the international order, such as the non-use of force and the non acquisition of territory by war. In many cases, this results in winning the battle for some but losing the war for all: forfeiting collective peace and security. Another question is whether India aims to be a "stand alone" pole. And if so, would it continue to be closely associated with the large democracies in the South as well as with other South constellations, the non-aligned movement and G77?

Baradei strongly believed that today's chaotic global order would be well served by an India that is a key spokesman for the "hurt" and the "hope" of the global South. In a global environment overshadowed by an inordinate dose of toxic nationalism, India can be an example of people's quest for a pluralistic, inclusive and nonviolent world. He has for long believed that India ought to be a permanent member of the Security Council. But until that happens, India should continue to speak up loud and clear on major issues that shape and affect our future. India should be a "City upon a Hill"; it can and ought to be a model for some of the best human values.

In the discussion, Baradei addressed several important issues. On the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW). Baradei noted that India had until it developed a nuclear weapon, a stellar record of fighting for disarmament- nuclear disarmament, and India continues to believe that nuclear disarmament is the way. India should be at the forefront of disarmament efforts. The use of a nuclear weapons, tactical or whatever, is possible. Everybody knows that once you use a nuclear weapon that's the end of it. There is no small or large nuclear weapon- that's the end of it. He said the nuclear weapons ban treaty was signed or concluded by 122 countries, so it is a large chunk of the human population, and their message is that nuclear weapons are awful, destructive, and cannot be used therefore, we should ban it, in the same way as the chemical and biological weapons. So, it is not something out of the ordinary, and in the case of chemical and biological the world has banned and eliminated them. And why can't the same be done with nuclear weapons? Unfortunately, the attitude of nuclear weapon states and members of NATO and others is quite negative toward the ban treaty. Three of the weapon states, the US, France, and the UK, said they will never be able to become a party to that treaty. They could have agreed to work together but to say this is absolutely out of the question is not a great thing. The first meeting of the parties to the TPNW is going to take place next in Vienna and there is a conference on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. So, though it's not going to happen overnight, but it would be good to talk to the others, the other camp that some of the NATO members are coming as observers. It would be great if India could come as an observer, make a statement, and express its views, on how India's commitment to nuclear disarmament



remains. It's really important to continue the dialogue.

On the issue of the utility of declarations, bilateral or plurilateral, on the non-first use of nuclear weapons, is something Baradei said that any guarantees to the rest of the world about non- first use are very important, though people do not believe in any commitments, guarantees, negative assurances. But if all the nuclear weapon states make a solemn commitment, a believable commitment that nuclear weapons, no matter what, will not be used first, at least it would be a beginning. What can we do until we reach disarmament to ensure that these weapons will not be used? But, it's the part of a process you cannot just talk about it alone. You have to talk about it in the context of cooperation, dialogue, and trust building, and not just in the context of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons reflect our fear and don't reflect our trust. But, yes, we need to talk about it. He noted that China had mentioned that it would never use nuclear weapons first under any circumstances, and he felt that everybody should repeat that. A collective statement by all the nuclear weapon states, even including North Korea. that says, we are not in the best situation, and we need to move forward and let us at least commit ourselves to non-first use.

On the Iran nuclear deal, Baradei said that, ironically, both the parties, the US and Iran, very much want the agreement to come back into force. But domestic politics had created hurdles. He said that the way to resolve the Iranian issue is through dialogue, gradual agreement, and building trust, and not sanctions, which make things even worse. He felt that at least have the agreement in place and then continue the dialogue, and this is where maybe India or some other non-participant in this dialogue right now could bring in some ideas or basically say, we do believe in the agreement, we need the agreement, and we are ready to mediate. He understood that all the technical issues are in place, it is just a question of whether the US will conclude this when they have the mid-term elections, can Iran conclude the agreement with the revolutionary guard labeled as terrorist, but it is necessary to separate domestic politics for the sake of a major security issue. The breakdown would be dangerous for the Middle East. An interlocutor can play a positive role. So, some groups of countries could help the two-parties get together in a compromise despite differences.