We Don't Do That: National Identity and Nuclear Non-Use

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Research Question

My thesis is concerned with the question of what factors impact public support for the use of nuclear weapons. More narrowly, I intend to evaluate two subsidiary questions: How do arguments about national identity affect support for nuclear weapons use, and how does knowledge of the institutionalization of non-use affect support for nuclear use? These questions build on existing research into the nuclear taboo, as will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

Theory

To understand what factors impact public support for nuclear weapons use, I intend to return to two of the mechanisms that Tannewald (2007) posits strengthen the nuclear taboo. The first is norms' constitutive effects on states' identity, and the second is the institutionalization of nuclear non-use.

In her book the *Nuclear Taboo*, Nina Tannenwald distinguishes between norms' regulative and constitutive effects on state behavior. Norms' regulative effects refer to how norms "constrain exogenously given self interest and behavior, or lead to recalculations by changing the 'price' of behavior," (Tannewald 2007, 45). In this formulation, consistent with rationalist interpretations of international relations, norms circumscribe states' behavior while

not actually impacting what states' interests are. Constructivist scholars, however, break down the assumptions that states' interests are independent of norms (Wendt 1999). Instead, they treat norms as being able to define behavior, roles, and identities, and shape individuals' impressions of their interests. Through their constitutive effects, norms may cause states to act in a given manner to validate a social identity. Studying the nuclear taboo within the U.S. context, Tannewald (2007) argues that by the end of the Cold War, the U.S. eschewed using nuclear weapons because it did not cohere with its identity as a "civilized" state. Furthermore, during the first Gulf War, American civilian and military leaders began explicitly framing the use of nuclear weapons as something antithetical to United States' identity. Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell called using nuclear weapons "un-American," and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu said that it was something, "we just don't do."

From theorizing on norms' constitutive effects, I generate my first hypothesis:

> **H1:** Public support for the use of nuclear weapons will decrease as people are exposed to arguments that the use of nuclear weapons is antithetical to their states' national identity.

Beyond implicitly held norms, Tannewald (2007) argues that the institutionalization of nuclear non-use reifies the taboo. What counts as the institutionalization of the nuclear taboo is diverse, according to Tannenwald. For example, it can take the form of formal disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, testing bans that stigmatize nuclear weapons development, and anti-ballistic missile treaties that legitimize deterrence.

Up to this point, a handful of survey experiments have looked into that priming survey respondents about international law has on the public's support for nuclear use (Carpenter and Montgomery 2020; Sagan et al. 2020; Sagan and Valentino 2024). Focusing on international law is constructive and contributes to scholarly debates outside of nuclear weapons use regarding its effectiveness in regulating state behavior; however, pursuant Tannenwald's initial theorizing, it is worth considering how other types of institutions affect support for

nuclear use. I propose focusing on no-first use policies, specifically. NFUs are unique among types of institutionalized non-use because they are explicit and unilateral. As compared international law, which does not explicitly ban the use of small-yield tactical nuclear weapons or similarly proportionate nuclear attacks, NFUs do. That being said, because NFUs are unilateral declarations of nuclear policy, they may be more flexible and more likely to be violated than multilateral agreements. Regardless, I intend to test the following hypothesis:

> **H2:** Informing people about their state's No First Use policy will decrease support for a first-strike nuclear attack.

It may also be reasonable to believe that there is an interactive effect between a state's no-first use policy and their national identity. If it is true, as constructivist scholars contend, that states seek to validate social identities within the international system, then declaring a No First Use policy should be one way through which a state can affirm its identity as a responsible nuclear power. The combined effect therefore of informing survey respondents about an NFU and exposing them to pacifistic national identity arguments may be greater than one treatment on its own. As such, I propose the following hypothesis:

> **H3:** Informing individuals about their state's No First Use policy in combination with exposure to pacifistic national identity arguments will reduce support for the use of nuclear weapons more than either treatment alone.

Literature Review

What is the nuclear taboo and how does it operate?

The nuclear taboo can broadly be understood as "the de facto prohibition on the first use of nuclear weapons," (Tannewald 2007, 10) which stems from a widespread moral revulsion to their use. A taboo is different from a norm in international relations insofar as it is absolute (Paul 1995; Tannenwald 2005; Schelling 2006; Tannewald 2007). Breaking

a taboo is not something that states may occasionally do, as they might deliberately kill civilians in an interstate conflict, but it is even "unimaginable." Transgressing a taboo represents crossing a "bright red line," which states will not do because it either violates leaders' principles, would lead to domestic uproar, or would cause international opprobrium.

The first generation of taboo literature was published in the first two decades after the Cold War and emphasized qualitative, case study-based research designs. Evidence of a de facto prohibition took the form of "taboo talk" in which heads of state and their advisors would dismiss the possibility of using nuclear weapons because doing so was perceived as contravening some widely held principle.

Although Nina Tannenwald and other scholars of the taboo primarily couch their argument in elite-level discourse, they extend it to public opinion, claiming that it too displayed a categorical aversion to the use of nuclear weapons during and immediately after the Cold War. This opposition could in part be seen through mass mobilizations, like the Freeze Nuclear movement, denouncing nuclear armaments. Such public condemnations of arms racing and proliferation stigmatized nuclear use and signaled to democratic leaders that they would be met with overwhelming domestic condemnation, and possibly risk their political futures, should they ever use nuclear weapons.

Beyond mass mobilizations, scholars of the taboo argue that public opinion polling from during and after the Cold War revealed an entrenchment of the taboo. Tannewald (2007) specifically highlights how surveys asking Americans to contemplate the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki show a steady decline in support for the use of nuclear weapons since the 1940s.[1] She also notes how polling conducted concurrently with various conflicts suggest that there would be a broad, public opposition to the use of nuclear weapons. During the first Gulf War, for example, more than 75% of respondents opposed using nuclear weapons should the war have become a stalemate, and a slim majority opposed the use of nuclear weapons even if Iraq attacked American troops with chemical or biological weapons

[1]See Sagan and Valentino (2017) for an overview of this polling.

(CNN/Time Magazine 1990).

Over the last ten years, a second generation of taboo research has been published, further evaluating the role that public opinion plays in propagating the nuclear taboo. Focusing on methodological innovations instead of theoretical ones (Smetana and Wunderlich 2021), new research has employed survey experiments to gauge the extent of public support for a first strike nuclear attack in various hypothetical scenarios. Scott Sagan and Benjamin Valentino notably simulated what they argue is a modern-day equivalent of the U.S.'s bombings of Japan. Arguing that polling Americans about their retrospective preferences for nuclear use at the end of World War II does not adequately prime them to think about the trade-offs of restraint, they found that more than a majority of Americans would support dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran's second largest city to end a ground war that would otherwise kill 20,000 American soldiers. Moreover, the degree of support is relatively insensitive to number of civilian casualties. Varying the number of casualties, Sagan and Valentino found that more than 60% of Americans would support dropping a nuclear bomb in the situation described, even if doing so killed more than a million civilians.

Adapting Sagan and Valentino's experimental design to other contexts, studies have found similar levels of support for nuclear use among the American public (Press, Sagan and Valentino 2013; Haworth, Sagan and Valentino 2019; Allison, Herzog and Ko 2022; Schwartz 2024). Such evidence casts doubt on the notion that American public opinion possesses an unwavering commitment to nuclear non-use, as proponents of the taboo suggest. In light of this consistent finding, scholars are increasingly concerned with whether there are cross-national differences in support for nuclear use, and what factors impact said support.

Cross-National Differences

Among the challenges that scholars currently face in deriving definitive conclusions regarding whether the nuclear taboo is that there is a dearth of survey experiments conducted outside of the United States. Looking at other western, nuclear-armed powers, Dill, Sagan and Valentino (2022) found high levels of public support for first strike nuclear attacks among

the French, British, and Israeli publics. Smetana and Onderco (2022), meanwhile, found that a majority of Russian respondents would oppose the first use of nuclear weapons against a NATO country. However, given NATO's mutual defense clause and its forward positioning of nuclear weapons in Europe, this conclusion is hardly surprising and does not represent a tough test for the taboo.

Scholars measuring support for nuclear use under the U.S.'s nuclear umbrella have found mixed support suggesting that the public would be supportive of a pre-emptive nuclear strike. Allison, Herzog and Ko (2022) measured differences in cross-national support for a nuclear attack against North Korea among the South Korean, Japanese, and American publics. The authors manipulated whether North Korea had first attacked South Korea or Japan with a nuclear or conventional weapon. In all cases across each country, the authors found that only a minority of respondents would prefer nuclear retaliation as compared to conventional retaliation or diplomatic condemnation. Sukin (2020) found similar results when exposing American and Korean respondents to a similar scenario, varying the likelihood of a successful retaliatory strike. In Europe, meanwhile, Onderco, Etienne and Smetana (2022) found that sweeping majorities of the Dutch and German public opposed the first use of American nuclear weapons stationed in their territory as of 2020, but that this opposition has substantially weakened since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Onderco, Smetana and Etienne 2023).

Outside of the west, Russia, and countries under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, few survey experiments have been conducted evaluating attitudes toward nuclear weapon use. Schwartz (2024) surveyed Indian public opinion, finding that a majority of respondents would support using a nuclear weapon against a terrorist cell in Yemen plotting to attack an Indian city with a dirty bomb. To the author's knowledge, no experiments have been conducted in Pakistan or China gauging the degree of public support for nuclear weapons use. That being said, Clary, Lalwani and Siddiqui (2021) fielded a survey experiment in Punjab evaluating how strongly public opinion would support an escalatory versus de-escalatory response to

conventional Indian provocation. In a hypothetical scenario, civilian and military leaders who supported the former enjoyed a boost in public support as compared to those who de-escalated tensions.

Overall the lack of surveys conducted outside of western, nuclear-armed powers raises questions about the generalizability of existing survey experiments measuring the nuclear taboo. Without further evidence, it remains unclear whether the public's apparent receptiveness to nuclear use is unique to the U.S. and its allies or more widely shared among citizens of nuclear-armed states.

Factors Impacting Support for Nuclear Use

As scholars seek to diversify countries surveyed by existing survey experiments, they have also sought to understand what factors impact public support for the use of nuclear weapons. Up to now, extant scholarship has largely focused on three factors: the strategic utility of nuclear compared to conventional weapons, civilian casualties and international law, and primes that may affect the individual psychology of survey respondents.

Although proponents of the taboo argue that the public's aversion to the use of nuclear weapons is categorical, survey experiments have consistently found that public support for a nuclear attack is conditional on the relative strategic benefits of using nuclear versus conventional weapons. Press, Sagan and Valentino (2013) find that by decreasing the chance of a conventional attack being successful in destroying a hypothetical Al Qaeda nuclear lab compared to a nuclear attack, the public's preference for nuclear use increased by nearly fifty percentage points. Sagan and Valentino (2024), meanwhile, show that public opinion is sensitive to arguments about nuclear weapons' strategic utility that people likely had not already internalized. Specifically, when exposing American respondents to the argument that nuclear use may set a bad precedent that could one day harm U.S. security, they find that support for nuclear use decreases by nearly twenty percentage points. Moreover, this reduction in support for nuclear use holds when respondents are exposed to counter-arguments contending that the effect of such a precedent were negligible.

Aside from arguments regarding nuclear weapons' strategic utility, scholars have also debated the effect that international law has on public support for nuclear use. Using the same vignette as Sagan and Valentino (2017), in which the U.S. deliberately bombs civilians in Iran's second largest city, Carpenter and Montgomery (2020) find that priming respondents about international law and noncombatant immunity causes the public's support for a first strike nuclear attack to decrease. Sagan et al. (2020), similarly, found that respondents who were told that a first strike attack would violate international law were less supportive of it, but that the effect it had was reversible when there was disagreement among the Chiefs of Staff over its legality.

Lastly, scholars have evaluated how different psychological cues can stimulate and reduce support for a first strike nuclear attack. Rathbun and Stein (2019) applied Graham et al.'s (2011) work on moral foundations to nuclear weapons use. Arguing that existing scholarship flattens the diversity of moral frameworks that people may apply to nuclear weapons use, they find that people who adopt more individualizing, cosmopolitan values are less willing to support nuclear weapons use than those who exhibit "binding" moral foundations.

Research Design

To test my hypotheses, I intend to employ a survey experiment in which Indian respondents are presented with a hypothetical crisis between India and Pakistan. The survey will be conducted via Amazon Mechanical Turk because of its cost efficiency relative to other convenience samples. Like other survey platforms in India, MTurk's samples are disproportionately young, male, upper-caste, and wealthy (Boas, Christenson and Glick 2020). To assign treatments, I will use a randomized experiment, where respondents are assigned to one of four groups. The control group will receive no information about India's NFU and no arguments condemning nuclear use. One treatment group will receive information about India's NFU but no arguments, and another treatment will read arguments condemning nu-

clear use but not receive information about India's NFU. Lastly, one treatment group will both be told of India's NFU and read arguments condemning nuclear use.

Drafts of the hypothetical news articles that respondents in each treatment will read are attached in the appendix below. The situation described is consistent with India's Cold Start doctrine and inspired by what security scholars consider to be the most likely case of Indian nuclear first-use (Kapur 2008; Clary and Narang 2019). Implemented after the Kargil War, Cold Start is Indian military doctrine enabling it to quickly mobilize along the border with Pakistan following a Pakistan-backed terrorist attack. Within a few days, India can then push across the borders with Punjab and Kashmir in an effort either to claim disputed territory of force a favorable compromise in which Pakistan stops sponsoring cross-border terrorism.

Although India publicly maintains a no first use policy, Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang argue that during such a ground-war India may contemplate launching a first strike nuclear attack. Because India's military is conventionally superior to Pakistan's, the latter may be incentivized to use a small-yield tactical nuclear weapon on the battlefield to hold territory and stop a further Indian incursion. However, given that Pakistan may use a nuclear weapon, India is in turn encouraged to preempt. Fearing retaliation against one of its cities, Clary and Narang argue that India may conduct a counter-force attack, in which it would target Pakistan's nuclear silos, airfields, and missile launchers in an effort to marginalize the chance of a nuclear attack.

A priori, it is difficult to know how successful such an attack would actually be, given uncertainty regarding where Pakistan's nuclear weapons facilities are, how effective its air defenses would be, and a range of other factors. In the article, I note that it is unclear whether all of Pakistan's strategic nuclear weapons have been destroyed, but that Indian government officials speaking on the condition of anonymity believe that there is a low chance of retaliation. I do so as to create a more difficult test for the taboo while not misleading respondents into believing that a counterforce attack would be guaranteed to

work. Furthermore, although it is difficult to gauge how many civilians would die in a counterforce attack, I note that the U.N. warns that it is possible hundreds of thousands did. Again, I do so as to not mislead respondents into believing that a counter force attack could be committed with little harm to civilians, even if the extent of that harm is ambiguous.

Within the article, key pieces of information that may affect respondents' support for nuclear use are highlighted in the article title, dek, and pull quotes. Specifically, I emphasize the number of expected casualties, the target of the attack being Pakistan's nuclear weapon facilities, that government officials believe there is little chance of retaliation, and that India launched the attack amid a ground-war with Pakistan.

Across treatment and control groups, the article is identical, except that people assigned to learn about India's no-first use policy read an additional sentence saying that "the nuclear attack violates long-standing Indian policy that it would never use nuclear weapons unless first attacked with weapons of mass destruction." A pull quote in the middle of the article is meant to draw further attention to this fact.

After reading the article, respondents in the control and NFU treatment groups immediately begin answering questions regarding their support for the use of nuclear weapons in the scenario described. People assigned to reading national identity-based arguments, however, are provided three arguments to read criticizing the use of nuclear weapons. Possible arguments that respondents will read are included in the appendix. Broadly, the arguments that I have written are meant to address different aspects of how conceptions of India's national identity impact its foreign policy. Some emphasize India's legacy of non-violence during the nationalist movement, others more explicitly address India's history of advocating for global disarmament, and a third kind emphasize a transcendent identity shared between Indians and Pakistanis. These arguments follow from previous academic literature on how India's strategic culture, national identity, and nuclear weapons policy overlap (Hymans 2006; Bajpai 2014). To decide what survey questions to include in my experiment, I hope to field a short preliminary experiment in which respondents read the vignette and then grade how

convincing a randomly assigned article is on a Likert scale. I would then include whatever arguments were graded as the most persuasive in my final experiment. That being said, considering I may lack funding, I may also forgo this trial experiment and use the first three arguments included in the appendix. I would chose these three in particular because they address different aspects of India's history vis-a-vis nuclear weapons and its identity relative to Pakistan.

When it comes to measuring how strongly respondents support the use of nuclear weapons, I intend to follow Sagan and Valentino (2017) and ask respondents two questions: How strongly would they have preferred using nuclear weapons compared to continuing the ground war, and how strongly would they approve of the use of nuclear weapons? Asking respondents the former provides information about what they believe to be reasonable conduct during war. Asking them the latter is a good indication of respondents' willingness to support the prime minister's decision to use nuclear weapons. This level of approval is also politically relevant insofar as respondents should prefer continuing the ground war but still approve of the use of nuclear weapons, then the government likely faces less political risk regardless of public preferences. To further probe the political implications of nuclear use, I intend to ask respondents whether nuclear use would make them more or less likely to vote for the sitting government and whether they would publicly protest the use of nuclear weapons. These questions are meant to be tougher tests for the degree of public outcry to the use of nuclear weapons.

Note that in keeping with Sagan and Valentino's survey experiments, I intend to use a six-point Likert scale to measure respondents' preference for and approval of nuclear use. On the scale, respondents must either approve or disapprove and cannot indicate that they are unsure or indifferent to the two options. This design mirrors the "trolley car" problem, which philosophers use to assess people's moral reasoning when faced with difficult ethical trade-offs (Sagan et al. 2020).

In addition to the above, I intend to collect information on potential covariates in a

pre-treatment survey administered to respondents. I specifically ask how strongly people approve the Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party on a seven point Likert scale. These questions will serve as controls for people's political preferences in the regression models described below. I will also ask how strongly respondents agree with the statements that "India should not use force against another country unless absolutely necessary" and "India should never use nuclear weapons unless it is retaliating against another country for using them first." Responses to these questions are meant to be highly correlated with their preferences for nuclear use after reading the hypothetical as to reduce standard errors and increase statistical power when I perform my statistical analyses.

To evaluate the support for my hypotheses, I intend to use two statistical procedures primarily. First is a difference of proportions test, comparing people's approval and preference for the nuclear attack between the control and treatment groups. Second is a logistic regression, in which I dichotomize people's approval for nuclear use as the outcome variable and include controls for people's demographics, their political beliefs, and their pre-treatment attitudes toward nuclear use. For robustness, I will also conduct a series of ordinal regressions, using the same independent variables as for the logistic regression.

Mock Results

With three variables of interest, there are a few different outcomes that we could observe. First, it is possible that all of our treatments will reduce support for nuclear use compared to the control by a statistically significant margin, in which case we would have evidence to substantiate all of our hypotheses. In contrast, if none of our treatments had a discernible effect or had a discernible effect in the opposite direction than we anticipated, then we would not find any evidence to substantiate our hypotheses. However, failing to reject the null would not necessarily mean that people's conceptions of national identity have no effect on their support for nuclear weapons use. It may be the case that national identity conceptions

impact people's support for the use of nuclear weapons, but that these conceptions cannot be changed with a relatively light intervention, like reading three approximately fifty word arguments. Regardless of if we suspect this to be the case, it would be worth subsetting our respondents based on those who support the BJP and those who support Congress. Considering that Congress is the party that descended from Nehru and the Indian nationalist movement, it may be possible that arguments' opposing nuclear use reaffirm people's extant political beliefs and decrease political support for nuclear use among Congress supporters while triggering a backlash effect among BJP voters making them more receptive to nuclear use.

If we were to find that arguments condemning nuclear use had an effect on people's support for nuclear use but not the effect of NFU or the interaction, that would lend support for our first hypothesis but not our second or third. It would suggest that norms' constitutive effects can impact public support for the use of nuclear weapons in the Indian context, but that the effect of enshrining non-use in declared nuclear policy does not. If the NFU parameter were statistically significant but not the arguments or interactive effect, then we would have evidence to substantiate our second but not our first or third hypotheses.

However surprising the result would be, it is also possible that our interactive effect is statistically but neither the effects of the NFU or arguments alone. If this were the case, it would lend credence to the argument that national identity based arguments can change public support for nuclear use, conditional on there being an explicitly declared no first use policy.

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A Survey Questions

op_inc

Please indicate your opinion of the Indian National Congress (INC):

1. Very favorable
2. Somewhat favorable
3. Neither favorable nor unfavorable
4. Somewhat unfavorable
5. Very unfavorable

op_bjp

Please indicate your opinion of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):

1. Very favorable
2. Somewhat favorable
3. Neither favorable nor unfavorable
4. Somewhat unfavorable
5. Very unfavorable

use_force

How strongly do you agree with the following statement: "India should not use force against another country unless absolutely necessary."

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Somewhat disagree

5. Strongly disagree

never_use_nuclear

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "India should never use nuclear weapons unless it is retaliating against another country for using them first."

1. Strongly agree

2. Somewhat agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Somewhat disagree

5. Strongly disagree

Post-Treatment Questionnaire

Attention Check

nuclear_target

In the news story that you read, what did India's nuclear attack against Pakistan target?

1. Multiple large cities

2. The Pakistani military in Kashmir

3. Sites throughout Pakistan suspected of hosting nuclear weapons

4. Pakistan's civilian government

5. Don't know

civilian_casualties

In the news story that you read, how many civilians were initially estimated to have died from the attack?

1. 1,000
2. 10,000
3. 100,000
4. 1,000,000
5. Don't know

Outcome Variables

approve_strike

Given the circumstances described in the article, how much would you approve or disapprove of India's nuclear attack?

1. Strongly Disapprove
2. Disapprove
3. Somewhat Disapprove
4. Somewhat Approve
5. Approve
6. Strongly Approve

prefer_strike

Given the circumstances described in the article, if you could have chosen between launching the nuclear attack against Pakistan or not launching the attack and continuing India's ground war, which option would you prefer?

1. Strongly Prefer Ground War
2. Prefer Ground War
3. Somewhat Prefer Ground War
4. Somewhat Prefer Nuclear Attack
5. Prefer Nuclear Attack
6. Strongly Prefer Nuclear Attack

vote_likelihood

Given the circumstances described in the article, how much more or less likely would you be to vote for a member of the sitting government in the next election?

1. Much Less Likely
2. Less Likely
3. Somewhat Less Likely
4. Somewhat More Likely
5. More Likely
6. More Unlikely

protest_likelihood

Given the circumstances described in the article, how likely would you be to publicly protest the use of nuclear weapons?

1. Very Likely
2. Likely
3. Somewhat Likely

4. Somewhat Unlikely

5. Unlikely

6. Very Unlikely

Manipulation Checks

strike_national_identity

Regardless of which option you preferred, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement that the use of nuclear weapons like that described in the article is antithetical to India's national identity?

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Disagree

3. Somewhat Disagree

4. Somewhat Agree

5. Agree

6. Strongly Agree

strike_non_violence

Regardless of which option you preferred, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement that India's use of nuclear weapons like that described in the article violates *ahimsa*?

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Disagree

3. Somewhat Disagree

4. Somewhat Agree
5. Agree
6. Strongly Agree

strike_ethical

Regardless of which option you preferred, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement that the use of nuclear weapons like that described in the article is unethical?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Somewhat Disagree
4. Somewhat Agree
5. Agree
6. Strongly Agree

Demographics

The following demographic information will also be collected in the survey if not already provided by the contracted survey firm:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Religion
4. Municipality
5. Education

6. Income

7. Caste

B Arguments

Argument 1 "The government's use of nuclear weapons was morally repugnant and contradicts Mahatma Gandhi's, Jawaharlal Nehru's, and this entire country's legacy of nonviolence. It violates everything that we know about ourselves—it should never have happened."

Argument 2 "India for decades has led the fight for a nuclear-free world, criticizing the Americans, British, and whoever else for their cavalier attitude toward nuclear weapons. Gandhi and Nehru wanted a safer world, a more dignified world, where the annihilating power of nuclear weapons didn't haunt anyone. This government's decision to use the same weapons, however, has made India abandon that legacy. We are now no better than rest."

Argument 3 "No matter what anyone may tell us, Pakistani civilians are worth nothing less than ourselves. We share a history even if it's troubled and Pakistanis deserve our decency. It does not matter if they would extend the same compassion to us, it matters how strongly we abide by our own principles as a nation."

Argument 4 "The use of nuclear weapons is not merely a strategic choice; it is a declaration about who we are. A nation shaped by anti-colonial struggle and moral restraint cannot reconcile its self-image with weapons designed for indiscriminate annihilation. To cross this line is to concede that power, not principle, now defines us."

Argument 5 "For generations, India claimed moral leadership by rejecting the logic that security must rest on mass destruction. That claim carried weight precisely because others failed to uphold it. By resorting to nuclear violence, this government has dissolved the distinction between India's vision of global responsibility and the reckless behavior it

once condemned."

Argument 6 "Indians and Pakistanis are not strangers separated by an unbridgeable divide; we are peoples shaped by a shared subcontinent, intertwined histories, and families that were once one. Borders may divide states, but they cannot erase a common cultural and human inheritance. To use nuclear weapons against Pakistan is to deny this shared identity."

C Vignettes

India launches nuclear attack against Pakistan amid intense ground war

The attack targeted Pakistan's nuclear weapons facilities,
casualties likely in hundreds of thousands

BBC News

DELHI—India launched a barrage of nuclear weapons at Pakistan late last night, targeting locations suspected of hosting its long-range nuclear missiles. The attack, which marks the first time nuclear weapons have been used in a conflict since the United States bombed Nagasaki, comes months after India invaded Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, setting off a grueling ground war.

A statement released by the United Nations Security Council warns that while the number of casualties from Monday's attack will not be known for several years, it will likely reach into the hundreds of thousands. The long-term effects of radiation on humans and the environment are unknown but expected to be severe.

In a statement posted on social media, the Prime Minister wrote that he authorized the attack to prevent Pakistan from striking an Indian city with a nuclear weapon. Although there was no indication that such an attack was imminent, he said that disabling Pakistan's nuclear capabilities was necessary to ensure India could take territory in Kashmir without risking excessive Indian casualties.

According to Indian government officials speaking on the condition of anonymity, it is unclear whether all of Pakistan's estimated 170 strategic nuclear weapons were destroyed in the attack but the risk of retaliation is low. In addition to targeting its warheads, India struck the airfields and missile launchers that Pakistan would use in a large-scale counter-attack. The officials cautioned that Pakistan still possesses small-yield tactical nuclear weapons that it may use on the battlefield, but that they cannot reach an urban area and can be intercepted with anti-missile defenses.

Low chance of retaliation, according to government officials

India's nuclear salvo marks a new chapter in what has been an intense months-long conflict with Pakistan. After a terrorist group backed by Pakistani intelligence services killed three hundred and forty three civilians in a multiday attack in Delhi, India responded by sending troops into Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. After initially seizing thousands of square kilometers of territory, India's gains have slowed and even reversed in some areas along the frontline. Meanwhile, casualties have mounted on both sides of the war. According to a leaked Indian intelligence assessment, both India and Pakistan have lost over twenty thousand soldiers in the war, excluding deaths from Monday's attack.

It remains unclear whether Pakistan will surrender.

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The attack violates long-standing Indian policy that it would never use nuclear weapons unless first attacked with weapons of mass destruction.

Attack violates long-standing no first use policy

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