



Rising Powers Initiative- Sigur Center for Asian Studies  
Policy Alert #20- January 31, 2012

### Indian Views on a Nuclear Armed Iran

**Can India play a role in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons? This Policy Alert highlights the differences in opinion amongst top Indian experts on issues of nuclear disarmament, India's energy security, and Indian-Iranian relations.**

India's "Great Power Realists" and "Hyper-Nationalists" are ideologically in favor of nuclear deterrence as a means of maintaining international security. On the other hand, "Leftists" and "Neo-Nationalists" are staunchly opposed to any country acquiring nuclear weapons.

- Bharat Karnad, well-known security expert at New Delhi's Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, believes that India is more secure because it has nuclear weapons. He does not support President Barack Obama's call for global nuclear disarmament, and generally is less critical of the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran.
- Mani Shankar Aiyar, Member of the Indian Parliament, argues that universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament should be the most important item on the international community's security agenda. He considers all nuclear-armed countries, from the United States to China to Iran, as threats to India's security; even India itself should not have developed nuclear weapons.

For those opposed to a nuclear-armed Iran, what do they think should be done? "Liberal Globalists" and "Standard Nationalists" tend to support multilateral diplomacy over great power politics.

- Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary of India, thinks that a nuclear-armed Iran would definitely be a threat to India, particularly because Pakistan, North Korea and China are behind Iran's proliferation efforts. Mansingh believes that sanctions do not work, and further stresses that India will not follow the United States in imposing bilateral sanctions. However, India could support sanctions if they are imposed on the basis of a United Nations resolution. In addition, Mansingh is disappointed that President Obama has toned down his initial call for global nuclear disarmament.

On the question of Indian-Iranian relations, and specifically Iran's energy supply to India, expert opinion is divided:

- Karnad argues that India cannot alienate Iran, for several reasons. India's Shia Muslim population is the second largest in the world, and they have a close affinity with the Iranian clergy. Moreover, India needs Iranian energy, which would be difficult to source elsewhere. India also relies on Iran's Chabahar port for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Mansingh strongly disagrees that India's Muslim population is a factor constraining Indian policy toward Iran. He believes that Indian Muslims identify with a democratic India and would support Indian security over a nuclear Iran. Mansingh is also confident that India would be able to source its energy from other suppliers if imports from Iran were stopped.

*The above views were expressed at a conference on "India as a Global Power: Contending Views from India," held on January 23, 2012 and co-sponsored by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies' Rising Powers Initiative and the Center for a New American Security. Details on the event, including speaker biographies and audio recordings, are available [here](#).*

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