

Letter to the Editor

Sir

In his very informative and analytic article *Beyond the 123 - Is There A Plan B?* (January-March 2007) General Shankar Roychowdhury has most aptly pointed out the need for fall back strategies to cater for a possible failure of the on going negotiations over the Indo - American nuclear deal. He has hit the nail on the head by suggesting *Swadeshi* nuclear power as the ultimate and the most reliable alternative. He is also very right in saying that "given the necessary focus and *will*, *Swadeshi* nuclear power is definitely do-able". The *will* of the nation, no doubt, is the one single factor that can make anything do-able. It is this *will*, that opens up ways and means for mustering up resources and it is only this *will* that can eradicate corruption and tax-evasion, ensure proper use of funds and produce self-sacrificing, honest and hard-working manpower, so necessary for taking up any national project. It is also this *will* that enables the people to bear the great hardships and sacrifices involved during the initial stages of the project without demurring. But it is exactly here that the problem starts. Lack of "necessary focus and *will*" has, in fact, been the bane of the nation in all major matters pertaining to the nation's development, growth and defence all through the country's post Independence era.

The need for retaining proper focus and exercising strong *national will* first arose in 1962 when we suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese. No doubt, we raised the strength of our armed forces three-fold, but was that enough? Even to those of us who witnessed the tragic events from the lowest rung of the ladder it was apparent that not enough was being done*. The strength of the armed forces that a country requires is dictated by the enemy and not by what is convenient. Considering the combined threat from China and Pakistan, hardly anyone can dispute that we are still far short of the required armed strength for facing such a

*Some of us of the younger lot asserted ourselves by writing about it in the USI journal. I for one wrote an article *Act or Perish* (April-June 1964) stressing the need for developing the national will for preparing against the Chinese menace. Interestingly, the NATO Fifteen Nations sought permission of the USI for reproduction of this article, which did not materialise for some reason or the other.

threat. Evidently, the *national will* tends to wilt in the face of the colossal effort required to prepare for the eventuality of having to prepare against both China and Pakistan at the same time. Consequently, an easier course based on convenience continues to be preferred - preparing against the weaker foe and hoping for the best against the strong.

Let alone China, we would not appear to be adequately prepared even against Pakistan. The effectiveness of the deterrent that we believe to have developed against the threat from Pakistan should be judged more from the way Pakistan has continued to be tempted to go to war with us again and again than the fact that it has been prevented each time from achieving its military objectives. An effective deterrent would leave no doubt in an opponent's mind as to the outcome of a war. Like China has left no such doubt in our minds. Had we been to Pakistan what China is to us, Pakistan would never have gone to war with us more than once. When Mr. Altaf Gauhar, Information Secretary to President Ayub Khan in the 1960's wrote in *The Nation*, an English daily of Pakistan, that all Pakistani operations against India 'were conceived and launched on the basis of one assumption: that the Indians are too cowardly and ill organised to offer any effective military response which could pose a threat to Pakistan', he was probably referring to miscalculations by the military junta before going to war with India as an alibi for Pakistan's failures. But it certainly shows our deterrence in poor light.

It does not look as if the Kargil Committee Report would make the status of our deterrence against Pakistan any better. According to the report, "the alternative [to 'Siachenisation'] should be a credible declaratory policy of swiftly punishing wanton and willful violations of the sanctity of the LOC". While one cannot dispute the inherent wisdom of the suggested policy, it would be well to remember that for such a policy to be 'credible' and effective it must be backed by adequate military strength. In fact, where is the need for any declaration of this policy, if the country concerned possesses the matching force level? The military strength would speak for itself. We have the example of China before us. It has left the Indo - Tibetan border more or less unoccupied and yet no one can think of violating it - not even for intruding into territory

under its illegal occupation. India, on the other hand, does not seem to possess a military deterrent strong enough to enforce such a policy.

Obviously, the *will* of the nation required for pushing through a cause cannot be taken for granted. Special efforts on the part of the government are required for inculcating it by educating a lot many people, on what is required to be done and convincing them of not only the do and die aspect of the cause, but also its own sincerity in the matter. This is easier said than done and considering that there is no precedence of any Indian Government embarking upon the task of creating the *national will* for any cause whatsoever; asking the present one to do so in respect of the proposed *Swadeshi* Nuclear Power may prove to be a rather tall order.

Yours sincerely

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