India’s Nuclear Doctrine

Why in news?

Former national security advisor (NSA) Shivshankar Menon has shed new light on India’s nuclear doctrine.

What is India’s nuclear doctrine?

- India’s nuclear doctrine was first enunciated following a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting in January 2003.
- Some of the main features of India’s nuclear doctrine are -

  1. Building and maintaining a **credible minimum deterrent**

  2. A **No First Use** posture i.e nuclear weapons to be used only in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere,

  3. Nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be **“massive”** and designed to inflict **“unacceptable damage”**.

- The concept of “credible minimum deterrence” is used in conjunction with the concepts of “No First Use” and “Non Use” against nuclear weapon states.
- It clearly indicates that India envisages its nuclear weapons as only a deterrent merely for defensive purposes and not as a means to threaten others.
What is the view of former NSA?

- In his book he indicates that India’s threat of massive retaliation need not involve nuclear strikes against enemy’s urban centres (i.e. counter-value or CV strikes).
- Instead, India’s massive response could take the form of targeting enemy’s nuclear arsenal (i.e counter-force, or CF strikes).
- This will the enemy with a diminished capability of striking back.
- He carefully differentiates between first use and first strike, which refers to a disarming CF strike aimed at leaving an adversary without nuclear recourse.

So the disarming CF strike need not amount to a ‘massive’ response, which might include civilian population too.

What are the issues?

- The effectiveness of India to execute a disarming CF strike that takes out most of Pakistan’s nukes is also under question.
- Pakistan is building up its nuclear arsenal faster than any other country. It is currently estimated to have 120-130 nuclear warheads.
- It is difficult for India to target are Pakistan’s small, highly mobile Tactical Nuke Warheads (TNWs) that are basically truck-mounted, tube-launched artillery.
- Furthermore, any impression in Pakistan of Indian counterforce strikes would incentivize their early use.
Source: Business Standard