

US-India Nuclear Deal

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Since the very mention of the separation of India's military from the civilian nuclear facilities on July 18 by Prime Minister Manmohan in his address to the American Congress, it became an uphill task for India to come to terms with such a deal. For the US on the other hand, it provided an opportunity to have a breakthrough, after twenty years of India's nuclear explosion in 1998. The US was convinced that India was not a nuclear proliferator like Pakistan under A.Q. Khan. This made it easy for the US to adjust to the changing realities. Hence, President Bush remarked about the real welcoming it; ". . . . Things change, Times change as leadership can make a difference." Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said: "We have made history".

The Bush Administration does not talk about roll back, reduction and elimination of India's nuclear capability, like the Clinton Administration did. Bush concentrates on global energy security and the US help to India's civilian nuclear programme. But it has not been acknowledged by the US that India is a nuclear weapon state, as Nicolas Buns, US Undersecretary of State, explained to the Press, after the deal has been signed. President Bush is determined to get the enabling legislation approved by the US Congress. This requires amending the US Atomic Energy Act 1978. There is clear majority for the Bush Administration in the US Congress now as the Republican Party of Bush is controlling both the Houses. But the various public opinion polls clearly show that Bush is fast losing popularity, though it does not matter to him as he is completing his second term in office. The Democratic Party is uncompromising as elections will be held to both the Houses soon. One Democratic leader expressed the view that India will make one thousand nuclear warheads because of Bush's clumsy nuclear deal.

There is however, no rosy picture about the nuclear deal in India. From the sketch details of the speech by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the Indian Parliament on February 22, it is clear that out of the 22 nuclear facilities, India would agree to open up 14 for international inspection by the IAEA and submit to international safeguards in perpetuity. India would also accept the Additional Protocol of the IAEA Safeguards. But India will keep eight of the nuclear installations as military facilities thereby solving a complicated separation process of the military from the civilian nuclear plants. The nuclear deal allows its strategic nuclear weapons programme thereby keeping them

from the public eye. The fast breeder reactors, both prototype and the test breeder will be free from the IAEA Safeguards; however, all new generation of fast breeders will be placed under safeguards. The CIRUS Reactor will be shut down in the next five years. But DHRUVA will be kept out of international safeguards. While there is no guarantee of the supply of nuclear fuel in perpetuity, lifetime supply of nuclear fuel is assured.

Though India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1968, India has never been accused of nuclear proliferation, as maintained by the Indian government all along. Dr. Manmohan Singh himself repeatedly stated that India is a “responsible” nuclear state. There is no tangible evidence of India benefiting from the deal as far as the civilian nuclear programme is concerned. Bush has appealed to the US private investors to help develop India’s civilian nuclear technology, but it is no big deal. India is self sufficient in its civilian nuclear development programme, but it produces only a little over three per cent nuclear power. There is no national drive in spite of the promise of 20,000 MW of electricity through its civilian programme. India diverted all the resources meant for producing electricity to its military programme. India’s nuclear power corporation specifically set up to oversee the production of electricity has become a façade.

India, with its one billion people is indeed energy starved to cope with the speed of industrialisation taking place in the country. The ongoing civilian nuclear programme is totally inadequate. But there is neither any specific American offer of new nuclear plants like the Russians have been making under international safeguards nor any financial help to buy and build them. The latest offer of uranium for Tarapore by Russia has been criticised by the US in spite of the nuclear deal. Bush’s appeal to the industrial houses in the US will not do. Thus India has made all the compromises in the nuclear deal. America has gained a great deal including all the information about India’s nuclear installations and the vital statistics about India’s military programme. It is most frustrating for India’s nuclear scientists to accept the harsh reality. Except the Tarapore nuclear power plant which is to be de-commissioned any time, all the nuclear power plants, both civilian and military, are indigenously built by these scientists. Therefore, there is a lot of sense in the Left Parties argument about the compromise on India’s national sovereignty. Stephen Cohen’s argument about inter-dependency and national sovereignty is simply deceptive as President Bush attacked Iraq in spite of the international inter-dependency. America has all along been behaving like a rogue state.

But the real concern in India should be about its security. National Security is in danger because of the ever widening gap between India’s and Chinese strategic nuclear capability. Though the nuclear deal does not mention anything about local or national security, the fact remains that India’s nuclear deterrence will not give adequate security from the large number of Chinese intercontinental missiles. India acquired nuclear capability against the Chinese nuclear threat. But even today, India does not have any missile of intercontinental range. With its intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), it can only protect itself against a Pakistani nuclear attack! India does not have any

thermo-nuclear capability because it has the self-imposed moratorium on nuclear tests. Now the nuclear deal will come in the way of any nuclear weapon development although the nuclear agreement does not say anything about it.

It is like the Chinese nuclear threat which exists though the Chinese have never threatened India's with nuclear weapons. Hence the conclusion is justifiable if the critics allege that India has compromised its national sovereignty and national nuclear security. India seems to have lost its nuclear independence with the conclusion of its nuclear deal.

India's critics of the nuclear agreement believe that these were avoidable compromises. It is often asked: How long India would continue its lonely furrowing? How long can India hold on and withstand the US pressure or some international criticism? Nuclear weapons monopoly is the real issue. A few countries can keep the nuclear weapons for ever and will not allow any other nations to have them. India has been consistently opposing this international double standard.

India has been resisting American pressure only to tell the world that there should be some international justice and fair play. It is only a narrow interpretation of India's nuclear policy when India's critics claim that India wants to become a great nuclear weapon state. Therefore, India should have continued to defy and resist American pressure, instead of making compromises. It already undermines whatever remains of India's nuclear policy.

There is one area at least in which India has gained something. There has been a steady improvement in the Indo-US relations. President Bush claims that there has been a shift in US foreign policy. He has been cautioning Americans to adapt to the challenges of the new American foreign policy.

India, according to him, which has opened up all its nuclear facilities, both civilian and military, symbolises the real spirit of the new American foreign policy.

The US and European nuclear markets will now be open to India. All the restrictions in the field of science and technology as a result of India's nuclear tests in 1998, will be withdrawn. This will apply to high tech conventional weapons and space technology. India can buy F-16 and F-18 high tech military aircraft, provided India has the money to go for them. President Bush's historic three day visit to India from March 02 has facilitated to open up a new chapter in the Indo-US relations.