

India-US Nuclear Deal: Its Ramifications

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It is common knowledge that India, after the defeat in the brief war in 1962 with China, defines its security against China's military strength. When China became a nuclear power in 1964, India accelerated its move to match China's nuclear power and became a nuclear nation in 1974. Thereafter there was a voluntary moratorium until the Vajpayee right-wing nationalist government resumed the nuclear military programme and conducted nuclear tests in 1998 to upgrade its nuclear warheads, matching China's.

One of the Vajpayee's Ministers, Ram Jethmalani, who wrote to Vajpayee before President Clinton's visit in 2000, to suggest a Mutual Defence Treaty. Substantial advantages, he argued, would flow to India if it was a part of what he called the Washington-London-Jerusalem-Tokyo axis.

In recent years, India's leaders have adopted another strategy. They have been able to impress the Bush administration that Indian democracy and social tolerance could have a moderating influence on the neighboring Muslim countries at a time of Islamic militancy.

In March 2005, the Bush administration announced that it sought "to help India become a major world power in the 21st century". It was unprecedented statement emanating from the US in respect of India's status. Not that they are natural allies, but because strategic interests coincide that provides the glue to make the two nations closer.

Everyone understands fully the implications of the statement of the Bush administration. It has not only military implications but also strategic importance for the US in making India as a major world power.

In July 2005, President. Bush received India's Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and followed up the deal.

Two years have elapsed to resolve certain tricky issues concerning Article 123 of the US legislation prior to concluding the deal. There were reservations of many politicians on both sides on the nuclear deal as it went against US policy of nuclear non-proliferation.. In India, left-wing politicians and scientific community raised objections on the condition built- in the nuclear deal that prohibits India from conducting further nuclear tests. India's some politicians saw it a derogation of sovereignty.

For some time both the US and India did not arrive at a mutually satisfied outcomes. In middle of July of this year, the President and the Prime Minister discussed the matter by telephone On 27th of July, finally the US and India adopted the agreement for nuclear deal .

President Bush hailed the agreement and effusively described India “a vital world leader”. The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, called the agreement as a “historic milestone”.

The deal is reportedly subject to the approval of the US Congress and India’s Parliament. Reports indicate that some of the US law makers have expressed reservations on the agreement on the question whether it is consistent with the US law.

What is the nuclear deal about?

The deal has largely three components:

First, India’s nuclear status, resulting from its open tests in May 1998, was accepted, by the US, exports of nuclear fuel were cleared for civilian use and remaining control on sensitive technology were lifted. Both nuclear fuel and sensitive technology would be available to India from the US, a rare and unique deal with a country that is not a party to 1970 Non-nuclear Proliferation Treaty.

Second, in return India has to put up “walls” between its military and civilian nuclear installations and allow some of its installations international inspections. It has to tighten its own controls on technology of possible military use. Originally India was not allowed to continue testing and to reprocess spent fuel.

Third, the deal has been struck in which the US is not to limit India as a nuclear power. The bottom line of the deal is that it allows to India to continue nuclear testing and reprocessing the spent fuel under IAEA, going one step further than a law adopted by the US Congress last December.

Why is the deal unique?

The right to reprocess the US-sourced nuclear fuel, given only to Japan and the European Union so far by the US, will be available to India as well. India reportedly has assured the US that reprocessing of fuel would be for peaceful purposes. It is a landmark agreement for India and no wonder Indian scientists have expressed jubilation on the agreement.

The deal has another implication. While India gets nuclear fuel from the US (Australia seriously considering to sell uranium to India in future) for civilian nuclear installations, Indian authorities will be now able to devote the limited supplies of domestic uranium exclusively to warhead production.

Observers believe that the nuclear deal will provide India the fuel and cover to accelerate further its nuclear weapons programme. India has been able to conclude a nuclear deal that will certainly provide an edge on nuclear weapons over China and Pakistan.

Power game in the 21st century:

Power game is as old as Socrates. Athens and Sparta went through several wars and ultimately Athens won. We had witnessed “great power game” between Russia and Britain during the 19th century and they realised that they could not defeat each other. So their boundaries stopped at Afghanistan. On the north was Russia and on the south was Britain.

There is no zero-sum in power game. One rises and the other falls. China’s emergence poses threat to the US’s supremacy in Asia Pacific region. The US wants a “Deputy Sheriff” in this area to look after its interests. Japan cannot take the responsibility to contain China.

So India is naturally considered a counterweight to China’s power. India has the natural resources, technology, size, population and geographical location, ideally suited to challenge China’s power in Asia-Pacific. That is why the Bush administration wants to see India “a major world power” with sophisticated nuclear weapons.

Indo-US common interests:

India has been able to come out of the straightjacket of the Cold War and has been taking a long-term view of its national interests. It was the former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in tandem with Manmohan Singh in 1991 who had launched economic reforms that provided impeccable cover for closer political and military ties with the US.

Economic reforms have a two-fold impact: First, it can provide India to pursue an ambitious foreign policy and secondly, India can spend money to strengthen its military power, matching China’s.

India fully realizes that it cannot achieve its due role in the region and globally without American participation. Only American power can restrain Pakistan’s adventurism and contain China’s increasing influence in the region.

Bilateral ties are as important for the US as for India. India considers the nuclear deal is set to achieve its dominant role in the region and in global affairs. On the other hand the US considers China as strategic “competitor” and India can, to a great extent, restrain China from becoming a supreme power in the Asia-Pacific region.

Conclusion:

Some political commentators believe that the US may consider China a strategic “partner” and set the world order of the 21st century not in confrontation, but in cooperation with China. China is neither a foe nor a friend of the US and it wants rightfully to establish its role in the global affairs together with other powers.

The implications of the nuclear deal are not likely to be lost to China and Pakistan. There is a risk that arms race may begin in Asia-Pacific region, with its inevitable disastrous consequences.

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