

Indo-US Nuclear Deal: The Continuing Drift in India's Foreign Policy

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The following is the (slightly updated) text of the paper presented at the event by Sukla Sen, an editor of the journal Peace Now, the organ of the Coalition for Nuclear disarmament and peace, India at the 50th Anniversary Conference of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation in Cairo from 26-28 feb. 2008.

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"We have an ambitious agenda with India. Our agenda is practical. It builds on a relationship that has never been better. India is a global leader, as well as a good friend. ... My trip will remind everybody about the strengthening of an important strategic partnership. We'll work together in practical ways to promote a hopeful future for citizens in both our nations."

President George W. Bush, February 22, 2006

[[1](#)]

Foreign Policy

The 'foreign policy' of a country or state essentially encompasses the formulation of doctrines - to define and shape the relationships of that particular country, under the incumbent regime, with the outside world in the global and regional contexts, and their actual working out.

The 'foreign policy' cannot but be strongly linked to the domestic policy. For one, it is essentially the same larger body of elite consisting of state managers and 'opinion leaders' etc. - notwithstanding their specific specialisations and niches, formulates the both. And it is the same range of interests, and ideology, that informs in both the domains.

Nevertheless, one is not the simple extension of the other.

The Indian Case

Independent India, its emergence rooted in the specificities of decades long huge anti-colonial mass struggles and the British colonial rule for about two centuries that it eventually overturned, charted

out a specific and well thought out path for itself [2].

Its foreign policy, from the very beginning but more so since the US backing up Pakistan's claim on Kashmir and the emergence of the People's Republic of China at its very doorstep, took a broad anti-colonial and anti-imperialist orientation, notwithstanding its own supremacist designs vis-à-vis the extended neighbourhood. This, however, did not deter it from actively engaging with both the major contesting global camps of the day, while maintaining some, even if fluctuating and asymmetrical, distances from the both. India's role as an active proponent of the doctrine of Peaceful Coexistence, since 1955 Bandung Conference, and its emergence as a major driver of the Non-Aligned Movement, formally launched in Belgrade in 1961, are just two most tangible manifestations [3].

However, the self-image and the perception of self-interest of the Indian elite, which itself underwent a very significant metamorphosis on account of the generational changes and, more importantly, the socio-economic developments initiated and engineered by the Indian State under its stewardship, evolved and changed over the decades [4].

In the outside world, at the same time, the mighty wave of decolonisation, rather paradoxically, came to a virtual close with the final and humiliating defeat of the US imperialism in Vietnam by the mid-seventies. The Soviet Bloc collapsed, virtually overnight, between 89 and 91. Neo-liberalism gained respectability since early eighties and became the reigning economic doctrine on the global scale some time thereafter. India adopted it with evident gusto particularly since 1991 [5].

Consequently the foreign policy, as a tool of promoting "national interest" as perceived and formulated by the ruling elite, also kept on taking a very different hue.

Of late these changes are getting much starker and alarming with the frank jettisoning of old practices and ethical posturing, courting of new friends, and shameless cosying up to the global hegemon in a determined bid, further spurred by the recent economic upswing, to emerge as a mini-hegemon [6].

The overt nuclearisation of South Asia in May 98 and India's role vis-à-vis the ongoing turmoil in West Asia are two very important markers in this unfolding process. So is the yet-to-be-wrapped-up Indo-US nuke deal [7]. Apart from its grave fallout on the nuclear scenario, both globally and regionally, it'd also mark a new breaking ground in the context of the continually evolving Indo-US relationship [8]. Some observers have even compared this development with Nixon's visit to Mao's China in the early seventies. And the intertwining of India's foreign policy and the nuclear policy had never been as salient, with so very menacing proportions. The foreign policy establishment, headed by the Prime Minister himself, has been desperately pressed into service to engineer safe delivery of the nuke deal, without as yet any spectacular success though.

Conversely, the anti-nuke peace activists in India are also grimly engaged with the issue in all its dimensions [9].

The Deal

The broad outlines of the deal were first laid out in the joint statement [10] issued by the Indian Prime minister and the US President on July 18 2005 from Washington DC and then further reiterated on March 2 2006 in another joint statement [11] by them issued from New Delhi incorporating the major elements of agreements between the countries reached till then.

The deal, in its essence, is meant to enable India, a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty (NPT) like (only) Pakistan and Israel, henceforth to have 'civilian' nuclear trade - in terms of nuclear fuel, technology, plants, spares etc., with the US, and also other nations so desirous, by making a unique exception in case of India. India in return will have to designate, at its own options, its nuclear reactors into two

categories - 'civilian' (for power production) and 'strategic' (for Bomb making), and ensure separation between the two. The 'civilian' reactors/plants only will be opened up for international inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The nuclear trade will accordingly be limited to the 'civilian' reactors only. In case of the 'strategic' ones, there will be neither any inspection nor any trade.

The deal as and when, and if at all, comes through will grievously undermine the current global regime of nuclear nonproliferation, as it is meant to make a unique exception in case of India, in gross violation of the underlying principles of the NPT, and thereby also the prospects of global nuclear disarmament. The fact that Pakistan has been brusquely refused a similar deal by the US in spite of persistent clamouring and Iran is being demonstratively coerced to desist from developing its own nuclear fuel cycle technology, integral to nuclear power production allowed and encouraged under the Article IV of the NPT, further brings out graphically the abominable discriminatory nature of the deal. Moreover, the lesson that one would tend to learn is that if one can weather the initial storms of international censures after breaking the nonproliferation taboo, things would normalise in a while. One may even get rewarded in the process. This is sure to trigger off stepped up vertical and horizontal proliferations.

Moreover, by enabling India to import fuel, natural or enriched uranium, from abroad, the deal would make it possible for India to use the indigenously produced uranium exclusively for Bombmaking. This possible escalation in its fissile material production capacity is, in all likelihood, push Pakistan further to nuclearise even at a great cost, and thereby aggravate tensions and accelerate arms race in the region with spinechilling consequences.

It'd also further cement the growing (unequal) strategic ties between the US and India and thereby would add momentum to the US project for unfettered global dominance and Indian craze to emerge as a global power basking in the reflected glory of the global headman. It would just not only undermine India's position as a founding and leading member of the NAM, it would also pose a very serious challenge to the NAM and its objectives in terms of radically raised level of US domination on the global scene.

India's rather meek submission to highly deplorable and dangerous threats issued and postures adopted by the Bush regime in relation to Iran and its nuclear programme instead of trying to find a just and fair solution in terms of having a Weapons of Mass Destruction free Middle-East including Israel is a clear and extremely worrisome pointer [12]. The talks on India joining the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) initiated by the US to interdict any vessel in international waters suspected of carrying (unauthorised!) nuclear materials, in gross violation of all international laws [13] and also the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme of the US (10B) are two other highly disturbing developments.

India's growing closeness with Israel, the frontline state of the US in the Middle East, would also pick up further pace in the process.

This deal would obviously distort India's energy options by diverting scarce resources to developments of resource-guzzling, intrinsically hazardous and potentially catastrophic, nuclear power at the cost of ecologically benign renewable sources of energy.

This would, furthermore, provide a strong boost to the nuclear industry worldwide, particularly the

potential suppliers from the US. And that's precisely why the business lobby in the US is working overtime to get the 'Deal' clinched.

The last visit by the Russian President Vladimir Putin to India as the guest of honour at the Republic Day event, in 2007, and his public commitment to supply additional nuclear reactors to India and work for the safe passage of the deal through the NSG underscores the convergence of interests of the nuclear power lobbies worldwide as regards the 'Deal' and the new market that it is promising to open up [\[14\]](#).

Putin and Sarkozy's India Visit and Manmohan's China Visit: Implications

The last visit of Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, as the guest of honour on the occasion of India's Republic Day (2007), has shown up in graphic details the divergence and also convergence between the Russian and US interests, particularly on the issue of the ongoing Indo-US nuke deal.

That Russia has, on this occasion, signed an MoU with India as regards intended supply of four additional nuclear reactors in future for the Koodankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu has been rather convincingly interpreted as an attempt on its part to preempt American moves to sell their wares and corner the Indian market, as and when and if at all the deal eventually comes through. The fact that Russia (Atomstroieexport), and France (Areva), had been pipped to the post by the US-based corporate Westinghouse, now a subsidiary of Japanese Toshiba, in the race to secure a giant deal to supply four nuclear reactors to friendly China with an estimated price tag of \$5 to \$8 billion must have had made Putin all the more desperate.

Rather paradoxically, but quite self-evidently, this desperation has also impelled Putin to demonstratively commit himself to garnering support for the American initiative to change the ground rules of the 45-member NSG to accommodate the Indo-US Deal in the making [\[15\]](#).

Similarly, this year, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced at the end of the visit, on the occasion of the Republic day, that the two countries had completed negotiations on a bilateral agreement covering a range of activities from research through "full civil nuclear cooperation including reactors, fuel supply and management." The agreement was initialed by French and Indian officials during the visit [\[16\]](#).

The joint declaration issued on Jan. 14 2008 by India and China, titled "A Shared Vision for the 21st Century", on the occasion of the Indian Prime Minister's visit to China, in a somewhat similar, even if in a significantly less emphatic, manner but with an element of much higher level of surprise, iterates the commitment of both the countries to bilateral cooperation in civil nuclear energy. It solemnly avers that "the two sides pledge to promote bilateral cooperation in civil nuclear energy, consistent with their respective international commitments, which will contribute to energy security and to dealing with risks associated with climate change" [\[17\]](#). And the China Atomic Energy Authority (CAEA) Chairman Sun Qin would likely visit India this year to discuss the process for bilateral nuclear cooperation.

Those who were/are trying to block or opposing the deal principally in terms of loss of India's national sovereignty cannot but be highly discomfited by the outcomes of these visits. That the Indo-Pak-Iranian gas deal has been kept alive, even if just that, despite strong American disapproval and India continuing with joint military exercises with Russia and also China will further underscore the essential untenability of such opposition. That the Indian Prime Minister attended the SAARC meet at Havana in September 2006 in preference over the UNGA meet in New York where the then Defence Minister, the second seniormost member of the Indian Cabinet, had been deployed while crucial debates in the US Congress had been under way as regards the deal with Indian Foreign Secretary being stationed in Washington DC to see the deal through brings out the highly complex

nature of the game that the Indian ruling elite is engaged with in the global arena. It also underscores the failure, or refusal, on the part of a significant section of the opponents that the deal is a manifestation more of misuse of national sovereignty than outright loss of it.

A Brief Update

As of now, the light seems to be dimming on the deal. The intensified obstruction offered by the Left parties in India coming on top of shrill opposition by the major Opposition groupings in the Indian parliament, as it appears, has queered its pitch. Though formal declaration on the death is not expected anytime soon. ([?])

Recent observations of Robert Blackwill, former US Ambassador to India, who had just quit the post of chief lobbyist for India in the US appointed to facilitate the fruition of the deal, are quite illuminating in this context. He could not help venting his frustrations at the first International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)-Citi India Global Forum meet in Delhi on April 20. "If I may be characteristically blunt, the next American president will not have the same sunk costs in the US-India civil nuclear agreement that this president (George W. Bush) and the top of the administration has". He further added that while the US will not pay any price if the deal does not go through, "India will pay a substantial price in its future energy policy, and its lack of civil nuclear assistance from the outside world". The only consolation on offer was that if the nuclear deal was not reached this year, "it would not produce a large bump in the US-India bilateral relationship" [18].

Conclusion

The deal as and when, and if at all, comes through will grievously undermine the current global regime of nuclear non-proliferation and thereby also the prospects of global nuclear disarmament. It is also likely to further aggravate tensions and accelerate arms race in the region.

It'd also further cement the growing strategic ties between the US and India and thereby would add momentum to the US project for unfettered global dominance. India is unlikely though to close doors on all others countries considered inimical by the US.

It'd also act as a booster for nuclear energy industry - which is as of now uneconomic, intrinsically hazardous, potentially catastrophic, dishes out false promise of being environmentally benign given its rather limited impact on reduction of emission of CO₂ and that too on a progressively reducing scale as the quality of the natural fuels keeps on deteriorating and also the fact that there is no failsafe method of disposal of continually piled up huge stocks of radioactive wastes and outlived plants and acts as a driver for developing nuclear warheads; and a considerable dampener for efforts to develop ecologically benign renewable sources of energy - nationally and also globally.

In essence, the deal is both an outcome and manifestation of the accelerated shift in India's foreign policy - propelled by the transmutation of Indian elite over the decades since Independence caused by the socio-economic developments within the country and also shift in global power balance - particularly since the early nineties, frankly embracing and glorifying realpolitik and dumping any pretension to an equitable global order.

Whether the deal eventually goes through or not, unless interrupted by popular resistance, the shift is likely to continue. However, the scuttling of the deal or even a change of regime in the US would most likely affect its pace, at least on the short term.

While moving closer to the US, the Indian elite are unlikely to surrender all the alternate options in tune with their burning ambitions to occupy a seat at the high table in the global asymmetric order.

Footnotes

[1] Source:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060302-13.html>

[2] See "From Colonial to Independent Economy" in *Essays on Colonialism* by Bipan Chandra; p. 315 -328 in particular (Orient Longman, 1999). As regards the foreign policy of independent India, Chandra succinctly posits his position thus: "India's foreign policy has played a major role in cementing the diverse social forces around the dominant leadership. Foreign policy and its cementing role have been consciously used to follow the path of independent capitalist development, to counter overt or covert imperialist blackmail, and to weaken the élan of the left-wing opposition." Also, Prelude to Power: The Meaning of Non-Alignment Before Indian Independence by T. A. Keenleyside in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Autumn, 1980).

[3] *India in a Changing World* by Achin Vanaik; p. 19 - 28 (Tracts for the Times, Orient Longman, 1995). Also Indian Foreign Policy: The Age of Nehru by Paul F. Power in *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 2. (Apr., 1964). India becoming a member of the Commonwealth, under the British Crown, on the very morrow of Independence had come as a shocker to many. But after the takeover of power in neighbouring China by the Communist Party after a protracted civil war, India became one of the first countries to recognise the new regime. India also persistently supported the claim of the People's Republic of China for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. It also criticised the US armed intervention in Korea under the UN flag. All these, understandably, contributed to the reversal of the role of the Communist Party of India towards the Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru in particular, and the government led by him. Disgracing of B T Ranadive and scrapping of his militant policies as the leader of the Party was the immediate outcome of this process of shift in India's foreign policy. See *The Swing Back: A critical survey of the devious zig-zags of CPI political line (1947-50)* by Tridib Chaudhuri in *Documents of the Revolutionary Socialist Party*, Vol. II, Lokayata Chtana Bikash Society, Agartla (2003). Also available at

[\[http://www.marxists.org/archive/chaudhuri/1950/swing-back/index.htm\]](http://www.marxists.org/archive/chaudhuri/1950/swing-back/index.htm).

In spite of the West remaining its by far the major trading partner, India tried to skilfully balance it by developing relationship with the USSR in many critical areas - supply of armaments in particular.

[4] *Indian Nationalism, Hindutva and the Bomb* by Sukla Sen (mimeoed working paper, available at

<http://india.indymedia.org/en/2003/09/7976.shtml>.)

Posted on ESSF: [Indian Nationalism, Hindutva and the Bomb](#)

[5] *The New Indian Right* by Achin Vanaik

(http://www.sacw.net/2002/achin_NewIndianRight.html)

Posted on ESSF: [The New Indian Right](#)

[6] For an elaboration of this new drive, see: *India's Foreign Policy Grows Up* by Sumit Ganguly (<http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/articles/wpj03-4/ganguly.html>). Also see for a far more unabashed and hawkish, but essentially similar, elaboration of this position: *Aim low, hit lower* by Bharat Karnad

(<http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/545/545%20>

bharat%20karnad3.htm).

Also, Prelude to Power: The Meaning of Non-Alignment Before Indian Independence by T. A. Keenleyside in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Autumn, 1980) for a discussion on a loss of values in foreign policy.

[7] See *India's Foreign Policy: Shifts and the Calculus of Power* by Kamal Mitra Chenoy and Anuradha M. Chenoy (<http://www.epw.org.in/uploads/articles/10980.pdf>).

[8] *The U.S.-India "Global Partnership": How Significant for American Interests?* By Ashley Tellis ([http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=17693&prog=zgp&proj=znpp,zsa,zusr)

[fa=view&id=17693&prog=zgp&proj=znpp,zsa,zusr](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=17693&prog=zgp&proj=znpp,zsa,zusr)).

And also see *India as a New Global Power: An Action Agenda for the United States* by Ashley J. Tellis

(http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/CEIP_India_strategy_2006.FINAL.pdf).

Faulty Promises: The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal by George Perkovich

(<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/PO21.Perkovich.pdf>)

for a different perspective. Also for an official Indian view INDIA-US RELATIONS

(<http://72.14.235.104/search?q=cache:FY4VE-LOzJkJ:meaindia.nic.in/foreignrelation/usa.pdf>).

[9] Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), India Condemns 123 Agreement and Abolition 2000 (Press Release 14 August 2007) in *Peace Now* (August 2007).

[10] See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/07/20050718-6.html> .

[11] See

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060302-5.html>.

[12] See NON-ALIGNED REALIGNING TO CONFRONT IRAN

(http://wmdinsights.org/Old_Global/March06/I3_G2_Global_Iran.htm).

However, the charge that India alone has broken the non-aligned ranks is just not factually correct. See the table in the link provided here.

[13] See

http://www.strategicforesight.com/sfgnews_150.htm.

[14] For a comprehensive analysis of the deal, see

<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/sacw/saan/2007/Res032007.html>. And for the current uncertainties, <http://timesnow.tv/NewsDtls.aspx?NewsID=6027>

and

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com>

/PoliticsNation/Time_running_out_for_N-deal/articleshow/2799657.cms.

[15] For recent developments in this regard, see Russia to build additional nuclear reactors in Kudankulam

(http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Russia_to_build_additional_nuclear_reactors_in_Kudankulam/rssarticleshow/2776917.cms).

Also, for a historical background,

<http://www.nti.org/db/nisprofs/russia/exports/rusind/react.htm>.

[16] See France, India agree on cooperation, but barriers to nuclear trade remain by Ann MacLachlan (Paris) and Mark Hibbs (Bonn) in *Nucleonics Week* (31-Jan-08).

Also see

<http://www.france24.com/france24Public/en/archives/news/world/20080125-france-india-nuclear-agreement-sarkozy.php>

[17] See

<http://www.indianexpress.com/story/303467.html>

and

[http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/FullcoverageStoryPage.aspx?id=5c35b6c0-217e-479d-8087-](http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/FullcoverageStoryPage.aspx?id=5c35b6c0-217e-479d-8087-1c0efe72329eNucleardealimbroglio_Special&&Headline=US+does+not+consider+nuclear+deal+'dead')

[1c0efe72329eNucleardealimbroglio_Special&&Headline=US+](http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/FullcoverageStoryPage.aspx?id=5c35b6c0-217e-479d-8087-1c0efe72329eNucleardealimbroglio_Special&&Headline=US+does+not+consider+nuclear+deal+'dead')

[does+not+consider+nuclear+deal+'dead'.](http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/FullcoverageStoryPage.aspx?id=5c35b6c0-217e-479d-8087-1c0efe72329eNucleardealimbroglio_Special&&Headline=US+does+not+consider+nuclear+deal+'dead')

[18] See

[http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-](http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/april-2008/next-us-president-may-not-push-n-deal-blackwill/)

[press/april-2008/next-us-president-may-not-push-n-deal-blackwill/.](http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/april-2008/next-us-president-may-not-push-n-deal-blackwill/)