

India-US Strategic Partnership

American Imperialism and Nuclear Carrot

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[Following is an expanded, rather elaborated, version of the keynote address given at the World Peace Forum in Vancouver, on June 25, 2006.]

The Bush administration has been trying desperately to get the controversial legislation dealing with nuclear cooperation with India through Congress; in hurry, and without any substantial amendments. It is in hurry, because if not approved by the Congress before the summer recess in August, it might die. And it wants it without substantial amendments, in order to avoid renegotiations with India.

After months of uncertainty and what seemed like an endless series of hearings, the House International Relations Committee (HIRC) as well as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), abruptly decided last week to put an end to the hearings process. The HIRC has scheduled June 27 for a “mark-up”—or fine-tuning the text—of a bipartisan legislation authored by its Chairman Henry Hyde and Ranking member Tom Lantos. The next day, SFRC would mark-up a bill authored by its Chairman Richard Lugar and Ranking Democrat Joseph Biden.

The Bush administration and its co-opted allies have been engaged in an all-out, multi-pronged effort to bring about this “abrupt” shift in the two committees:

- (i) In the last week of May, the American Jewish Committee came out with its full weight behind the nuclear deal. A letter signed by E Robert Goodkind, president, and David A Harris, executive director of the AJC, and sent to all the Senators and Representatives stated: “After almost 50 years of misunderstanding, India and the United States are on a path of rapidly increasing cooperation that includes counter-terrorism and regional security efforts, and touches on many sectors - political, commercial, scientific and educational”.
- (ii) Ashley Tellis, a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who was co-opted by the Bush administration to assist Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns during the round of negotiations with India, had already appeared before the HIRC back in November 2005 when he presented a ten-point “Certificate of good Conduct” to India. A self-proclaimed “card-carrying member” supporting the Bush nuclear-deal agenda, Tellis appeared again at HIRC on May 11 and warned the lawmakers that “any legislative ‘improvements’ to the current proposal would kill the deal”. And, should the agreement fail because of the lack of Congressional approval, it would “do grave, perhaps lasting, damage to the on-going transformations in the US-India relations, US regional policy in South Asia, and US efforts to successfully manage a resurgent Asia”.
- (iii) Then came the deployment of what has been dubbed as “the most potent weapon” in Mr Bush’s armory: Nobel Laureate Mohammed El Baradei, Director-General of International Atomic Energy Agency. After meeting with Condoleezza Rice on May 24, El Baradei appealed to the US lawmakers in both the House and the

Senate and declared the India-US nuclear deal “a step forward”, a “win-win agreement”.

- (iv) Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice herself stepped in, working overtime and in overdrive. She has been busy phoning members of the two committees and other influential lawmakers for the last several weeks. In addition, senior officials from the State Department and the National Security Council, as well as Under Secretary of State for Political affairs Nicholas Burns are reported to have “continued to pound the corridors of Congress in both the House and the Senate meeting with lawmakers”, persuading and winning over.
- (v) Hooked to the notion of “India, the Big Power” and believing that the US-India nuclear deal was crucial for the well-being of the home country, a large number of rich and resourceful Indo-Americans came out in full force, under the banners of outfits like US-India Friendship Council. Campaigns like “DC Chalo”(Let’s go to DC) were organized. Special banquets were held at the Capitol Hill. Fund-raisers were organized for individual politicians, as for example for Congressman Sherrod Brown of Ohio who was holding out but ended up supporting the Bush agenda. By June 18, Ashok Mago of Dallas Texas claimed to have “delivered 16 of the co-sponsors” and expected “to add another five-seven Congressmen in the next few weeks.” A very telling case is of Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee (Texas Democrat) who was initially a co-sponsor of (Massachusetts Democrat) Ed Markey’s anti-nuke resolution but switched sides to co-sponsor HR 4974 - the pro-Nuke-deal resolution. Ashok Mago claimed that the Indian American community in Texas “had also delivered both Senators from the state as co-sponsors of the administration bill in the Senate”. Such mobilizational efforts by Indo-Americans were carried out in many parts of the USA.
- (vi) Finally, rather importantly, there was the induction of the big-league corporate world. US-India Business Council president Ron Somers retained what is known to be the most expensive lobbying firm in the US Capital, Patton Boggs; engaged exclusively to push for the approval of the nuclear deal in Congress. The firm lined up meetings for the Chairman and CEO of Gen. Electric, Jeffrey Immelt with the key lawmakers; as well as for the CEOs of firms like Boeing, Ford Motor Company, Federal Express, American International Group, Lockheed Martin, and many more. According to Somers, these lobbying sessions were choreographed strategically by Patton Boggs “as to who will be the most effective spokespeople at these meetings”. For example, “when it comes time for a meeting with (SFRC Chairman) Senator Lugar’s people, of course it helps to have ITT industry—because they are the largest employer in Indiana, etc.” Aerospace Industries Association also came forward with its own baggage of pressures.

All this eventually paid off. The two important Committees of the US Congress have given up all opposition to the proposed deal with India.

To sum up, here is a quote from a senior (Bush) administration official: ‘The double-team approach of industry and the Indian American community has been very effective, and while sending a letter is good as our planting op-eds in leading newspapers, the best results have come from real investors in India and Indian Americans going up to Capitol Hill, sitting down with the leadership and explaining to

lawmakers how important this deal is—that it is much bigger than simply the sale of nuclear reactors to India, but the very core of the strategic relations between the US and India.” (*postscript: The two Congressional Committees have already passed their resolutions on the assigned dates, as was predicted.*)

The next task is to move the proposed legislation to floor action by the full House and Senate during July. The passage through the two chambers cannot be taken for granted. Not only are there likely to be significant differences between the draft legislations in the two chambers, several issues still remained unresolved. It is very probable that the US Congress would accept the advice given by the Council on Foreign Relations, in a 27-page report authored by Michael A. Levi and Charles D. Ferguson, both Council Fellows for science and technology. This recently released report titled ‘US-India Nuclear Cooperation: A Strategy for Moving Forward’ suggests a “two-stage compromise approach in order to envisage the legislation’s passage”. “Congress should formally endorse the deal’s basic framework while delaying final approval until it is assured that critical non-proliferation needs are met”. Congress might do just that.

The proposed Bush legislation aims to amend Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, in order for the US to make a one-time exception for India in the existing global non-proliferation regime so that India can keep its nuclear weapons without signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

In precise terms, if approved, the “123 Agreement” would allow the US to lift its own ban in supplying India with nuclear fuel, technology as well as Reactors, a ban that has been in place for more than 30 years (caused by India’s first nuclear explosion in 1974). India is expected to separate its civilian nuclear facilities from the military ones, and subject the civilian facilities to a new protocol of safeguards agreement between India and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

India has already identified 14 of its 22 nuclear facilities (existing or in the process of being built) as civilian. That means that the remaining eight facilities could be used to produce essential fuels for nuclear bombs; even more easily since the need for nuclear fuel for the civilian facilities would be henceforth met by the US and, hopefully, other suppliers. The proposed agreement is a tacit acceptance of India as a Nuclear power, as well as a recognition that there was nothing that the US or anyone else could do to prevent India from making more bombs.

There are still unresolved and contentious issues, not only for some of the worried US lawmakers, but - given the far-reaching implications - for the global community as well.

(a) What will remain of the already limping Non-Proliferation Treaty, if this deal goes through? Also, even if India is allowed to keep its bombs, and even make more of them, how could one ensure that it would not carry out further nuclear tests? India is refusing to oblige, as it wants to be treated as one of the other Nuclear powers, and is committing only voluntary moratorium. Furthermore, can India be expected to sign, besides the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the newly proposed Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT)?

(b) Then there are further hurdles and uncertainties, even if the Bill went through the US Congress. What kind of special agreement India will make with IAEA for safeguards inspections? Would this be in public domain, or kept secret? Given the fact that the Bush Administration has refused to share the draft nuclear cooperation agreement with even the Congress, there is reason for considerable suspicion and anxiety.

(c) A big hurdle would be an agreement with the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) on the procedures of treating India as an exceptional case, for the purposes of nuclear commerce. Would the US-India nuclear cooperation deal have any international legitimacy without the agreement acceptable to NSG?

This 2005 George Bush's offer of a special nuclear cooperation deal didn't just spring up from no-where. For the past several years, India has been gradually but steadily moving to embrace USA and its strategic and foreign policy orientations. Here are some samples:

(a) Even before the 9/11 event of 2001, India had already endorsed the new strategic framework and the National Missile Defense program unveiled by George Bush in May 2001, even as formal American allies withheld their support.

(b) Within 3 days after the 9/11 attack on the WTC in NY and Pentagon, India came forward with full support to US's "anti-terrorism" campaign, and made an unprecedented offer of three air bases in addition to unspecified port facilities for the attack on Afghanistan.

(c) India expressed no opposition whatsoever to America's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty, despite the widespread condemnation of the US action, internationally and even within the US.

(d) India endorsed the US position on environmental protection and global climate change in the face of strident global opposition.

(e) India assisted the US initiative to remove Jose Mauricio Bustani, Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons despite strong third world opposition in the United Nations.

(f) Indian Navy protected (on the suggestion of the Americans) high-value US cargoes transiting the Straits of Malacca during the early phase of the war on Afghanistan, despite the absence of India's traditional requirement of a covering UN mandate. This joint patrol program continued for six months.

(g) India refused to join the international chorus of opposition to the US-led coalition campaign against Iraq, ignoring repeated pleas from other major powers and third world states to that effect. In fact it came very close to providing an Indian army division for post-war stabilization operations in Iraq, despite widespread national opposition to the US-led war.

(h) India became increasingly allied with Israel, abandoning its decades old commitment to the cause of Palestinian and other Arab people and nations. The process has been slowly in the making for quite some time, going back to the days of Rajiv Gandhi prime-ministership during the 80's, culminating in the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1992. But it escalated during the Hindutava regime (the Vajpayee government) of 1998-2004. During the India-Pakistan

Kargil war of 1999 in Kashmir, Israel supplied India, at a 24-hour notice, with high altitude surveillance vehicles and laser guided systems. The alliance further deepened after the 9/11 episode of 2001. Ariel Sharon arrived in India as an honoured guest in 2003 to strengthen “Tel Aviv-New Delhi-Washington” axis, which India’s Security Adviser of the day, Brajesh Mishra, was pleading for at his speech to the American Jewish Congress a few months earlier. The change of government in India from BJP to Congress has not changed anything. Today India is the biggest purchaser of high-tech Israeli weapons, and is the destination for almost half of Israel’s arms exports. Israel has also been training thousands of Indian soldiers in “anti-insurgency”.

It is in the context of all this that one has to view the emerging “strategic partnership” between India and the USA. Already in 2001, immediately after India’s unconditional support to the US “war on terror” and the instant lifting of the sanctions the US government had imposed after the 1998 nuclear tests, a “strategic partnership” document was adopted; which was followed in February 2004 with the “Next Step in Strategic Partnership” (NSSP). Inescapably bogged down with wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq while obsessed with a search for more “enemies” in some kind of an “Axis of Evil”, stretched too far militarily, and mired into an economic quagmire with dollar-hooked economies, especially the oil and gas-rich ones, moving one by one into the Euro orbit, George Bush and his neo-con administration has been desperately looking for new, dependable and, hopefully, dependent allies to uphold the senior Bush’s “new world order”. India appeared to be an easy and willing catch.

Three important publications highlight the unfolding US agenda, vis-a-vis India. The first is the 2003 classified report commissioned by the US Department of Defense called “Indo-US Military Relations: Expectations and Perceptions”, authored by Juli A MacDonald (an associate at Booz Allen Hamilton). The second is a compilation of chapters on a rather comprehensive list of topics, published in 2004 by the US Embassy in India, *People, Progress and Partnership: The transformation of US-India Relations*, with a foreword by the then out-going Secretary of State Colin Powell, who echoed Prime Minister Vajpayee in calling India and the USA “natural allies”. And, finally, there is Stephen Blank’s 207-page monograph, “Natural Allies? Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation”, published in September 2005 by the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. All three are important in identifying the thrust of American interests in roping India into its imperialist designs. A special note needs to be made of the classified 153-page Pentagon report prepared by Juli MacDonald. Commissioned by US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and based on 82 interviews with military, security and government officers in India and the USA, the report’s intention was to identify the impediments that exist in forging a closer Indo-US relationship. This classified document was strategically leaked. The first installment in March 2003 to Jane’s Foreign Report was clearly aimed to drive a wedge between India and China. India’s Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had just returned from a weeklong visit to China where several agreements were signed between the two countries. Jane’s Report quoted the Pentagon document saying that the US and India were forging long-term defense and security alliances aimed at containing China, a country both saw as an

emerging regional and global power. “China represents the most significant threat to both countries’ security in the future as an economic and military competitor.” But driving a wedge between India and China was only a part of the scheme. The Report highlighted, among many other things, the desire of US military people having access to Indian bases and military infrastructure, while the US Air Force specifically desiring the establishment of airbases in India. “American military officers are candid in their plans to eventually seek access to Indian bases and military infrastructure. India’s strategic location in the centre of Asia, astride the frequently traveled Sea Lanes of Communication linking the Middle East and East Asia, makes India particularly attractive to the US military”, the report stated.

The groundwork was well laid out. A few weeks before George Bush and Manmohan Singh inked the July 2005 Nuclear Cooperation Deal in Washington, a 10-year Framework Defense-Agreement was signed. Building upon the earlier defense cooperation agreement of 1995, the new Agreement took India deeper into the US strategic designs. Talking of “the vital importance of political and economic freedom, democratic institutions, the rule of law, security, opportunity around the world”, its goals included “defeating terrorism and violent religious extremism”, and providing for collaboration in “multinational operations when it is in their common interests”. With no reference to international bodies like the United Nations, the Agreement opened the way for Indian participation in American-led military operations. Although Admiral Gary Roughead, Commander of America’s Pacific Fleet, denied it in an interview when he was recently in India, the Defense Agreement also envisaged joint patrolling of important sea-lanes such as the Malacca Straits. In any case, military-to-military co-operations have increased many-fold: growing frequency of bilateral exercises, seminars, personnel exchanges as well as sales of military technology. The military exercises have become increasingly more sophisticated and advanced. For example, the September 2005 Malabar exercise (just south of the Goa beaches), involving US aircraft carrier Nimitz and India’s Virat collaborated on everything from a joint diving salvage operation to a 24-hour “war at sea” scenario. As Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat (former Chief of Naval Staff - India) has pointed out, another “key element of the engagement process is the enlarged ‘International Military Education and Training’ program which has a questionable record and history in the role that some of the US trained and sponsored officers subsequently played in overturning democratically elected governments, replacing them with military juntas or in allying with civil servants who subtly further US interests in their home countries.”

“Our goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century”, explained a senior US official. The agreement’s purpose was made clear when former US ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, asked, “Why should the US want to check India’s missile capability in ways that could lead to China’s permanent nuclear dominance over democratic India?” It is very doubtful if the real concern was dominance over India.

Despite all these developments the nuclear cooperation deal inked in July 2005 *was not a done deal*. It was more like a carrot, temptingly hanging in front of the eager faces of the Indian government establishment. Again and again, the carrot would be replaced by a rod, and used to extract one thing or the other. The goal was to use the promise of the nuclear cooperation deal to shape India’s foreign

policy, and to subject it to the US strategic interests. American Ambassador to India, David Mulford, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice brandished the rod many times, blatantly and arrogantly: if you want the nuclear cooperation deal, do this, or do that; otherwise no deal for you. Unbelievable as it may sound, such invariably was the tone.

George Bush could not think of a better place on earth to make a state visit last March. It didn't matter if some unhappy politicians might embarrass him in case he spoke in Parliament. No matter if millions of people were marching on the streets of India, burning his effigy. Man-mohan Singh's state took care of insulating him from all that. And with 5000-plus American security people who came with him he didn't have to worry about personal security matters either.

The political, diplomatic, and even military "strategic partnership", though significantly important in the current situation, do not still provide the whole picture. In the ultimate analysis, it is the subordination of India's economy, the muscular and brainy power of its workers, its natural resources, its markets, which amounts to the centrality of American imperialism's hegemonic drive.

India is obliging in every possible way. It has opened up practically every sector of its economy to imperialist capital. Hardly anything is left as a sacred cow. While the Indian big capital is benefiting a lot, as well as the growing professional class, the conditions of life for the vast majority of the people have deteriorated immensely in the last decade or so; and they are going to be even worse given the many agreements the US has wrung out of India in the last one year alone.

As for the retail markets, Wal-Mart may have to sit it out for a while before opening its big-box stores in India. If and when that happens, it is not difficult what would begin to happen to the 40 million people and 11 million outlets in India's retail sector (small shop and stall keepers, vendors and hawkers etc.). As a step in the direction on January 24 this year the government took a decision to allow up to 51 percent foreign direct investment in retail stores, but this applies only to "single brand retailers (like Nike, Levi, Nokia, Louis Vuitton, Rolls-Royce, etc.). In the meantime, Wal-Mart, as one of the biggest food retailers in the world and especially in "partnership" with the giant Monsanto Seed Corporation, has much to gain by being on a body like "Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture". It is significant to point out that under this "Initiative" US private capital will have full access to the research facilities of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and will be very much in a position to influence its agenda. It becomes all the more ominous given the fact that the Indian government's department of biotechnology is pouring colossal sums of money into ICAR research efforts.

As all this happens, a piece of India is indeed "shining", with glamour and glitter; in fact, quite smug in the new world of opportunities, new levels of self-confidence. This piece of India does not care what happens to the workers who fight for better working conditions and get beaten up by cops. Or, to the poor peasants and tribal communities whose land is grabbed by big capital backed by multi-nationals for mining, for super highways, or other mega projects, and who too get shot by cops if they protest. Or, to the ordinary people whose legitimate entitlements are taken away to appease World Bank, IMF and other such bodies. It is this "piece of India" which is not even bothered by the fact that India, by linking up with the USA, is in fact becoming a junior partner of the greatest robber of the

world, who does not recognize any international law, any multi-lateral body, and who has a blood-soaked history of making “strategic partnerships” with numerous countries only to be abandoned when they became a liability or an hindrance. This piece of India is totally oblivious to the system of imperialism. But then they are a part of it, either as integral to the big capital based in the US or elsewhere, or as its functionaries and com-pradors, all too eager to bite on the carrot of the nuclear deal hanging in front of their faces. ? ? ?