

India and the Iran Vote in the IAEA

By Ninan Koshy | October 27, 2005

India's vote in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) against Iran in September came as no surprise to anyone who has followed closely the recent course of India's foreign policy. It is a safe guess that support for U.S. actions on Iran was one of the conditions of India's nuclear deal with the United States, which was given the final seal of approval by President Bush during the July 2005 visit of the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Washington.

The Bush resolution sponsored by the European troika found that "Iran's nuclear activities and the resulting absence of confidence that its nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes have given rise to questions that are within the competence of the Security Council, as the organ bearing the main responsibility for the maintenance of internal peace and security."

India, one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) rejected the positions of the NAM on the issue and found itself in the awkward position of disagreeing with other leading countries in the NAM such as South Africa and Malaysia at the Vienna meeting. It also deliberately distanced itself from China and Russia, which along with several non-aligned countries abstained from voting on the resolution.

The U.S.-India Alliance

It was clear that the resolution formed part of the Bush administration's designs on Iran in the context of the war on terror and the United States had plans to strangle Iran's oil and gas sectors and bring about "regime change" in that country. The Indian leaders knew that what was at stake was not the danger of proliferation but the right of a sovereign country to develop nuclear power as a source of nuclear energy. Yet India voted for the resolution thus endorsing not only the Bush administration's positions on Iran's nuclear program, but also their broader plans to promote regime change in Iran. This explains why Indian officials have not been able to openly respond to the serious questions raised about India's vote.

Shyam Saran, the highest-ranking civil servant in the Ministry of External Affairs, is reported to have informed Iran's Ambassador to India, Siavash Sargar Yaghoubi that "New Delhi had tried to act in Iran's interests in the International Atomic Energy Agency governing board." According to diplomatic sources, Mr. Yaghoubi told Mr. Saran that Teheran was very much disturbed by India's stance. The Iranian Ambassador was diplomatic enough

not to tell Mr. Saran that his claim was preposterous. There is a pitiable naivety and deplorable duplicity displayed by India in the whole Iran episode.

The United States had a clear objective in ensuring that India, a leader of the non-aligned and the developing nations, broke away from them to join in the unjust indictment against Iran. The U.S. Undersecretary of State, Nicholas Burns, was quick to hail India's vote "as a blow to Iran's attempt to turn this into a developed world versus developing world debate."

The commitment Washington extracted from the Indian Prime Minister in July to vote against Iran if it came to a crunch, was followed by a campaign against India on Capitol Hill. Congressman Tom Lantos, in remarks before the House International Relations Committee, said India had to choose between the "ayatollahs" of terror and the United States.

Through this commitment the United States wanted to undermine India-Iran economic relations to such an extent that New Delhi became a stakeholder in the drive for "regime change" in Teheran.

During his visit to Washington in July, Prime Minister Singh was asked about India's discussions with Iran on the proposed gas pipeline (Iran-Pakistan-India). According to the *Washington Post*, Prime Minister Singh said India desperately needed new sources of energy. He then added, "But I am realistic enough to realize that there are many risks considering all the uncertainties of the situation there." Prime Minister Singh knew very well that the "uncertainties" in Iran were largely created by none other than his host President Bush. The unwarranted remarks about Iran indicated that India was ready to ditch Iran at the behest of the Bush administration.

Immediately after the vote against Iran in Vienna, Iran informed India that the five-million ton a year Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export deal, with deliveries scheduled to begin in 2009 for a twenty-five-year period, was off.

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Three days later in Tehran, Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed surprise at the manner in which India had voted. He said, “Iran will revise (those) economic relations and those countries [that voted against Teheran in the IAEA] will suffer. Our economic and political relations are coordinated with each other.” It is evident that the proposed gas pipeline also is in peril.

“A responsible state with advanced nuclear technology,” is how President Bush described India, in admitting it to the hallowed nuclear club presided over by the United States during the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Washington in July. He was putting the final stamp of approval on India’s application for membership, which had already been cleared by the middle of 2001. After September 11 of that year, lifting all nuclear-related sanctions, the United States began treating India, though not officially naming it, a “responsible nuclear weapon state.”

The joint Bush-Singh statement of July 18 said, “India would be ready to assume the same responsibilities and practices and acquire the same benefits and advantages as other leading countries with advanced nuclear technologies such as the United States.”

India had expressed its willingness for a deal with the United States on the nuclear issue, on day one itself of its nuclear explosions in May 1998. However the clinching of a deal had to wait till the Bush administration took office and resurrected the Star War in the name of National Missile Defense. The Bush administration made India’s endorsement of the NMD a condition for giving approval to India’s nuclear weapon program. No wonder India most enthusiastically endorsed it as soon as the project was announced by Bush at the beginning of May 2001.

When the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government came to power in New Delhi in the middle of May 2004, it assured the Bush administration that it would continue the new foreign and nuclear policies of its predecessor, the Hindu Nationalist Party’s government, expressing its keenness to strengthen the strategic alliance.

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice during her visit to New Delhi in March, 2005 openly raised objections to India’s proposal for a gas pipeline from Iran, and dropped a broad hint that the Indian aspirations for a greater role in international affairs would be better served not through reform of the UN—and a permanent seat for India in the Security Council—but through ad hoc U.S.- led multilateral initiatives. The message was clear. India’s relations with countries identified as “opponents of the United States” were subject to approval by Washington.

By the time of the Indian Prime Minister’s visit to Washington this summer the military alliance of India with the United States had reached “hitherto unimaginable and unprecedented levels of cooperation” to use the wording of the Defense Framework Agreement signed in Washington this past June. The commitment demanded from India was clear: “Behave as a nuclear power which has the closest military alliance with the United States.” The vote against Iran was only a natural corollary. The next meeting of the IAEA in November will reveal the depth of this emerging U.S.-India alliance.

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