

The Regional Implications of the U.S.-India Nuclear Agreement

By Shehzad Nadeem | April 28, 2006

As the U.S. Senate begins debating the new nuclear agreement with India, far too little attention is being paid to the regional security implications of the deal. Instead of simply rubber stamping the deal, the Senate should examine its far reaching effects on security and nonproliferation efforts.

This past March, President George W. Bush reached a landmark agreement on nuclear cooperation with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Despite a terrorist attack in Karachi two days before his scheduled visit, Mr. Bush also traveled to Pakistan. Whereas his arrival in New Delhi was marked by glitz and pomp, Bush was met staidly by Pakistani President Musharraf's daughter in Islamabad under cover of darkness. This contrast was emblematic of what Bush was to accomplish on his South Asian tour.

The U.S.-India agreement, which must be approved by the Senate, gives India unprecedented access to U.S. civilian nuclear technology in exchange for the opening of its non-military facilities to international inspection. Pakistan's request for similar assistance was unequivocally rejected.

While in Pakistan, Bush issued a vague statement affirming the two countries' "strategic relationship" in the war on terrorism, urged democratic reforms, and tried his hand at cricket. Downplaying the special treatment for India, Bush said, "Pakistan and India are different countries with different needs and different histories. As we proceed forward, our strategy will take in those well-known differences."

The offer of nuclear assistance to India reverses decades of U.S. policy and lifts the moratorium on nuclear commerce with India. Although the Bush administration maintains that the greatest threat to

U.S. and global security is nuclear proliferation, the agreement loosens export control laws and clears the way to provide nuclear assistance to a country that has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, an international agreement designed to stop the spread of deadly nuclear technology.

Critics of the deal are concerned that India's ability to purchase nuclear fuel and technology from the U.S. for civilian reactors will free up domestic supplies of uranium for use in its nuclear weapons program. And with the gaps in its program filled by U.S. nuclear technology, India can afford to be more ambitious and could pursue a far more expansive nuclear weapons program.

Secondly, as India gets to decide what facilities are to be classified as civilian - some 14 of 22 reactors - its military facilities will remain entirely outside the purview of international inspections. At the unsafeguarded reactors, it can vastly increase production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. And as the weapons program expands, there will be an increased threat of nuclear catastrophe at both the local level due to substandard nuclear safeguards and at the international level.

While India has imposed a moratorium on nuclear testing, the current deal does not require India to limit its fissile material production nor restrict the number of weapons it plans to produce. India also retains the right to develop future fast-breeder reactors.

Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF)



The guiding assumption behind the agreement seems to be that a bad deal is better than no deal.

According to the leading Pakistani newspaper, Dawn, what is “bothering” Pakistan about the deal is that although India, like Pakistan and Israel, has refused to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the deal amounts to de facto acceptance of India as a legitimate nuclear weapons state. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri declared the administration’s refusal to offer Pakistan similar terms “discriminatory” and “unacceptable.” He indicated that Pakistan wants equal treatment and will go elsewhere for nuclear support.

While Pakistan has forfeited any moral standing it may have had on the issue of nuclear proliferation upon the unraveling of A.Q. Khan’s extensive black market network, the agreement gives fresh impetus to a nuclear arms race in the region. Should Pakistan wish to continue the race, it will likely receive the baton of nuclear assistance from China.

Shortly after the deal was announced, Pakistan expressed interest in purchasing nuclear reactors from China. As Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) points out, China has already assisted Pakistan’s civilian program in the past and was named by the CIA as the “principal supplier” of the Pakistani weapons program. Were it not for China’s assis-

tance, Markey said, “Pakistan would not have acquired nuclear weapons...including provision of a tested nuclear weapons design, which A.Q. Khan distributed to Libya and perhaps other countries.”

Beyond supporting its Pakistani proxy, China may also choose to fortify its nuclear arsenal, potentially prompting a regional arms rivalry. According to Samina Ahmed, a nonproliferation expert at the International Crisis Group, Pakistan will play catch-up with India “not only through expanded nuclear ties with China, but also by a more aggressive pursuit of nuclear technology from the global nuclear bazaar.”

For the United States—the first country to develop nuclear weapons and the only to use them—to pursue a course that heightens tensions and increases the likelihood that they may be used again is deeply irresponsible. The U.S.-India nuclear deal increases proliferation risks in the region and is a step backwards for global nonproliferation efforts. Congress should take these dangerous side-effects into account and either require major changes in the agreement or reject it altogether.

Shehzad Nadeem is an analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at www.fpif.org) and a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, San Diego.

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the International Relations Center and the Institute for Policy Studies. ©Creative Commons - some rights reserved.

Foreign Policy In Focus

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to “making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner.” For more information, visit www.fpif.org.

Recommended citation:

Shehzad Nadeem, “The Regional Implications of the U.S.-India Nuclear Agreement,” (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, April 28, 2006).

Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/3248>

Production Information:

Writer: Shehzad Nadeem
Editor: Erik Leaver, IPS

