

On India-US Nuclear Deal

## **No nukes for peace**

Monday 13 August 2007, by [BIDWAI Praful](#) (Date first published: 10 August 2007).

August 9 was the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the atomic devastation of Nagasaki. It is an appropriate, if sad, occasion to look at the military as well as energy implications of the India-US nuclear agreement.

The nuclear deal is as much about weapons as civilian power. Not only does it recognise India as a "responsible" state "with advanced nuclear technology"; it specifically distinguishes between India's civilian and military nuclear facilities while placing the former under international inspections (safeguards). Its Article 2.4 affirms that its purpose is "not to affect the unsafeguarded nuclear activities of either party" or to "hinder or otherwise interfere" with any other activities involving "material and technology" acquired or developed "independent of this agreement for their own purposes".

Put simply, India can produce and stockpile as much weapons-grade material as it likes in its unsafeguarded and military-nuclear facilities, including dedicated weapons-grade plutonium producers like Dhruva, the uranium enrichment plant near Mysore, the Prototype Fast-Breeder Reactor (PFBR) under construction, and the eight power reactors (of a total of 22 operating or planned ones) exempted from the agreed separation plan.

According to an International Panel on Fissile Materials report, the eight reactors alone will yield 1,250 kg of weapons-grade plutonium a year, enough to build 250 Nagasaki-type bombs. In addition, the PFBR and Dhruva will respectively produce 130 and 20-25 kg of plutonium annually. India can use imported uranium for its safeguarded reactors and dedicate scarce domestic uranium exclusively to military uses, generating up to 200 kg of plutonium after reprocessing.

This will each year allow India to more than triple its existing estimated plutonium inventory of 500 kg, itself enough for 100 warheads. The deal leaves India free to build even more weapons-dedicated facilities. Surely, this puts India's potential nuclear arsenal way beyond the realm of a "minimum deterrent". This should put paid to the argument that the deal will cap India's nuclear-military capability. If anything, the deal panders to India's vaulting nuclear ambitions.

Washington made unique exceptions in the global non-proliferation order for India primarily to recruit it as a close, if subordinate, strategic ally for reasons elaborated since 2000 by Condoleezza Rice, Ashley Tellis and Philip Zelikow, among others. A strong rationale was to create a counterfoil to China, and an anchor within a US-dominated Asian security architecture, on a par with Japan and Israel.

There's a price to pay for this. This isn't merely acquiescence in US strategic-political plans, or accommodation to Washington's pressures in respect of Iran. It also, critically, lies in potentially triggering a regional nuclear-arms race and abandoning the fight for global nuclear disarmament. It is sordid that India, long an apostle of nuclear disarmament, should end up apologising for mass-annihilation weapons.

Will the deal help India achieve energy security? Nuclear power is a hazardous and accident-prone energy source.

Its radiation is an invisible but deadly poison; it leaves extremely toxic wastes which remain active for thousands of years. No solution to the waste-storage, leave alone disposal, problem is on the horizon.

Nuclear power is costly. A Massachusetts Institute of Technology study estimates US unit costs of 6.7 cents for nuclear, 4.2 cents for coal, and 3.8-5.6 cents for gas. In India, power from nuclear plants under construction will cost Rs 3-plus. But the winning bid for the coal-based Sasan project is only Rs 1.20.

Nuclear power has a bleak future worldwide - despite global warming, which the nuclear industry claims it can mitigate. Nuclear power

can only make an insignificant contribution to greenhouse gas reduction. A just-published Oxford Research Group study says that for nuclear industry's contribution to be significant, the global industry would have to construct about one reactor a week for 60 years - an absurdity.

Nuclear power in India is less than 3 per cent of its total electricity capacity. Even if its utopian mid-century targets materialise, nuclear power will only contribute 6-7 per cent to power generation. What price are we paying for it?

---

**P.S.**

\* From The Times of India, 10 Aug 2007. Circulated by South Asia Citizens Wire | August 12-13, 2007 | Dispatch No. 2434 - Year 9.

\* Praful Bidwai is a commentator on public affairs.