

The Nuke Deal and Its Brokers Must Go!

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The Nuke Deal from its inception was part of the US hegemonic design intended to erode India's sovereignty and turn India into the US' strategic pawn in South Asia. This was clear from the moment the Deal was used as bait and bribe to get the UPA to vote against Iran at the IAEA - and the Manmohan Government in indecent eagerness, forced India to swallow it hook, line and sinker. The Hyde Act and the various pronouncements of US Senators only confirmed that what the US wanted from the Deal was to clinch the "congruence" of Indian foreign policy with US' imperialist strategy. Ironically, George W Bush, widely held to be the most hated US President both in the world and in his own country, has been hailed by no less than the Prime Minister as the most India-friendly US President!

The 123 Agreement in conjunction with the Hyde Act is the worst blow yet to our sovereignty. While the US Agreement with China expressly forbids the US from citing its national laws to overrule the treaty, the Indo-US Agreement maintains a loud silence on this. The unequal nature of the 'Deal' is even more eloquently conveyed by the fact that the 123 Agreement is enabled by a US Act of Congress, while Indian Parliament is not even willing to put the Agreement up for a vote!

The pro-nuke lobby, in its desperation to defend the Deal is trying to whip up an anti-communist hysteria. One is reminded of how Manmohan Singh accused opponents of the Bush visit of 'Muslim appeasement' - now opponents of the Nuke Deal are being branded as Chinese agents; and all this by the same forces who are all too ready to subjugate Indian sovereignty and self-respect to the US. The Indian envoy to the US Ronen Sen must be withdrawn - and not because his temper tantrum violates diplomatic etiquette, but because his views, reflective of those of the ruling establishment, are an insult to India's independence. Along with the taunts heaped on the Left, Sen declared that the Hyde Act is the 'law of the land' and is here to stay. Whose land, Mr. Sen? Manmohan Singh and his envoy Ronen Sen are desperate to assure Bush that US word is our law, but Sen's outburst reflects their frustration at the fact that the Indian people are not willing to accept this status.

The fate of the Deal and of India's national interests is now bound up with the tactics of the Left vis a vis the UPA Government. The need of the hour is for the Left to ensure the defeat of the Deal and expose the craven pro-imperialist nature of the Manmohan Government. Manmohan Singh dared the Left to withdraw support if they wished, emboldened no doubt by the fact that be it on the issue of the Patents' Amendment Act or the SEZ Act or any other issue of national concern, the CPI(M)'s bark was belied by its failure to bite.

On the issue of the Nuke Deal too, the CPI(M) is answerable as to why was the Deal allowed to come this far to the brink of completion. One is reminded of the Congress' handling of the Babri Masjid issue: refusing to stop it decisively, rather facilitating the inexorable march of events, and eventually presiding over the demolition of the Masjid and its bloody aftermath.

A quick look at the CPI(M) trajectory over the Nuke Deal is in order. When Bush came visiting and the Deal was first touted, the CPI(M) reduced its opposition to Bush to the issue of the Iraq war, steering carefully clear of any mention of the dangers of India's own pro-imperialist economic and foreign policy. Later, by exhorting the UPA Government to safeguard an 'independent foreign policy' alongside the Deal, and by applauding the PM's "assurances" on this count, CPI(M) helped to

maintain the fiction that the technical and economic benefits of the Deal could be made compatible with independence of foreign policy. This, despite the fact that the PM's "assurances" stood nakedly belied in India's IAEA vote against Iran. After the Hyde Act was passed, CPI(M) finally told the UPA Government to "Walk away from the deal". But even at that late date, when it was clear that no 123 Agreement could possibly safeguard India from the compulsions spelt out in the Hyde Act, the CPI(M) made no move to withdraw support even as the UPA Government dismissed its injunctions and forged ahead with the Agreement.

It is even now unclear whether the CPI(M) will take the decisive step of ensuring the defeat of the Deal and the UPA Government on the floor of Parliament. The signs are that the CPI(M)'s careful calibration of its closeness and distance from the UPA Government is to continue. From outright opposition to the 123 Agreement, it has shifted stance slightly to tell the Government not to move forward from the Agreement until the Left's concerns and doubts regarding the Hyde Act are addressed. It has withdrawn objections to the Government attending the IAEA meet in September, but has asked that the issue of India-specific safeguards not be discussed at the meet. It has demanded a discussion in Parliament on the Agreement - but no voting. And some of its leaders have even indicated that "withdrawal of support" need not necessarily mean CPI(M)'s vote against the UPA Government in a no-confidence motion leading to a mid-term poll; rather the UPA Government may be allowed to continue as a "minority government" with the CPI(M)-led left extending "issue-based support".

Such equivocation and vacillation can only give the Deal more breathing space and help it to survive. A paper (whose editorial policy is in sharp contrast to the anti-Left tenor of most of the media) has suggested as much: advising the Congress to see the Left as seeking a 'breather' for the Deal rather than as a 'deal breaker'. This paper has suggested that delay will not mean the death of the Deal, and if Manmohan Singh wants to save the Deal, he must first save his Government by taking the time to address and assuage the Left concerns about independent foreign policy. Saving the Government is equated with saving the Deal: the unspoken suggestion is that the Deal can be saved if the Congress is far-sighted enough to offer some face-saver to the Left.

The Left is agreed that the Nuke Deal is of burning concern for India's interests. If Indian Parliament cannot vote on a matter of supreme concern of our sovereignty, what relevance can it claim as a democratic institution? Discussion under the "No Vote" clause may allow the CPI(M) a chance to delay pulling down the Government - but to thus protect the Deal from its inevitable fate in Parliament is nothing but a blow to India's democracy and a shot in the arm to the pro-imperialist forces.

The argument that BJP may benefit is spurious. BJP's opposition to the Deal is widely recognized to reek of double standards. The battle lines are clearly drawn between the Indian ruling class and the Left on the crucial issue of defending Indian sovereignty from imperialist interests. At this historic juncture, the need of the hour is for the Left to break free of its own tactical ties to the Congress. The UPA Government's pro-US policy - over the Nuke Deal, the Nimitz war ship, the proposed joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal, the vote against Iran - are inexorably drawing India into the US stranglehold. Is the Left willing to take its opposition to these policies to its logical political conclusion? Will the UPA Government, would-be architect of this slavish deal and a client relation with the US, be ousted from power? Any vacillation at this juncture will be immensely costly for the country's sovereignty and the credibility of the Left.

P.S.

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