

India-US: Derailing a deal

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NUCLEAR-armed states are criminal states. They have a legal obligation, confirmed by the World Court, to live up to Article 6 of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which calls on them to carry out good-faith negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons entirely. None of the nuclear states has lived up to it.

The United States is a leading violator, especially the Bush administration, which even has stated that it isn't subject to Article 6.

On July 27, Washington entered into an agreement with India that guts the central part of the NPT, though there remains substantial opposition in both countries. India, like Israel and Pakistan (but unlike Iran), is not an NPT signatory, and has developed nuclear weapons outside the treaty. With this new agreement, the Bush administration effectively endorses and facilitates this outlaw behaviour. The agreement violates US law, and bypasses the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the 45 nations that have established strict rules to lessen the danger of proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, observes that the agreement doesn't bar further Indian nuclear testing and, "incredibly, ... commits Washington to help New Delhi secure fuel supplies from other countries even if India resumes testing." It also permits India to "free up its limited domestic supplies for bomb production." All these steps are in direct violation of international nonproliferation agreements.

The Indo-US agreement is likely to prompt others to break the rules as well. Pakistan is reported to be building a plutonium production reactor for nuclear weapons, apparently beginning a more advanced phase of weapons design. Israel, the regional nuclear superpower, has been lobbying Congress for privileges similar to India's, and has approached the Nuclear Suppliers Group with

requests for exemption from its rules. Now France, Russia and Australia have moved to pursue nuclear deals with India, as China has with Pakistan - hardly a surprise, once the global superpower has opened the door.

The Indo-US deal mixes military and commercial motives. Nuclear weapons specialist Gary Milhollin noted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's testimony to Congress that the agreement was "crafted with the private sector firmly in mind," particularly aircraft and reactors and, Milhollin stresses, military aircraft. By undermining the barriers against nuclear war, he adds, the agreement not only increases regional tensions but also "may hasten the day when a nuclear explosion destroys an American city." "Washington's message is that" export controls are less important to the United States than money" - that is, profits for US corporations - whatever the potential threat. Kimball points out that the United States is granting India "terms of nuclear trade more favourable than those for states that have assumed all the obligations and responsibilities" of the NPT. In most of the world, few can fail to see the cynicism. Washington rewards allies and clients that ignore the NPT rules entirely, while threatening war against Iran, which is not known to have violated the NPT, despite extreme provocation: The United States has occupied two of Iran's neighbours and openly sought to overthrow the Iranian regime since it broke free of US control in 1979.

Over the past few years, India and Pakistan have made strides towards easing the tensions between the two countries. People-to-people contacts have increased and the governments are in discussion over the many outstanding issues that divide the two states. Those promising developments may well be reversed by the Indo-US nuclear deal. One of the means to build confidence throughout the region was the creation of a natural gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan into India. The "peace pipeline" would have tied the region together and opened the possibilities for further peaceful integration.

The pipeline, and the hope it offers, might become a casualty of the Indo-US agreement, which Washington sees as a measure to isolate its Iranian enemy by offering India nuclear power in

exchange for Iranian gas - though in fact India would gain only a fraction of what Iran could provide.

The Indo-US deal continues the pattern of Washington's taking every measure to isolate Iran. In 2006, the US Congress passed the Hyde Act, which specifically demanded that the US government "secure India's full and active participation in United States efforts to dissuade, isolate, and if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction."

It is noteworthy that the great majority of Americans - and Iranians - favour converting the entire region to a nuclear-weapons free zone, including Iran and Israel. One may also recall that UN Security Council Resolution 687 of April 3, 1991, to which Washington regularly appealed when seeking justification for its invasion of Iraq, calls for "establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery."

Clearly, ways to mitigate current crises aren't lacking.

This Indo-US agreement richly deserves to be derailed. The threat of nuclear war is extremely serious, and growing, and part of the reason is that the nuclear states - led by the United States - simply refuse to live up to their obligations or are significantly violating them, this latest effort being another step toward disaster.

The US Congress gets a chance to weigh in on this deal after the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group vet it. Perhaps Congress, reflecting a citizenry fed up with nuclear gamesmanship, can reject the agreement. A better way to go forward is to pursue the need for global nuclear disarmament, recognising that the very survival of the species is at stake.

P.S.

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