

Bush secures nuclear accord with India

By Keith Jones
3 March 2006

US President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced in New Delhi yesterday that they had “finalized” an accord under which the US will push for India to be given a “unique” position within the world nuclear regulatory regime.

Although India is a self-avowed nuclear-weapons state and as such refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Washington—in keeping with the agreement it reached with New Delhi last July—will press the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to amend their rules to allow the export of nuclear fuel and civilian nuclear technology to India.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Manmohan Singh, Bush labeled the Indo-US nuclear accord “historic,” then proclaimed it to be in America’s national interest because expansion of India’s civilian nuclear capacity will lessen her dependence on imported energy and thereby lessen pressure on world oil and natural gas prices.

Unquestionably, there are economic motivations behind the agreement. For one thing, the US nuclear industry hopes to cash in.

But Washington’s real aim is to take US-Indo relations to a new level in accordance with the offer that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a year ago of US “help” in India becoming a “world power.”

The Bush administration has aggressively courted India because it wants to harness the South Asian state to its strategy for maintaining US predominance in Asia—above all, to serve as an economic, military and geo-political counterweight to China.

Bush made an oblique reference to the strategic motivation for Washington’s attempt to forge what it calls a “global partnership” with New Delhi, when he said that the “transformation of the US-India relationship” will have “decisive” influence on the world geo-political order in the coming century.

India’s United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has embraced the accord for two reasons. Because it constitutes de facto recognition of India as a nuclear weapons state, opening the door, or so goes the reasoning, to India obtaining other elements of the world-power status its elite so covets. And because the import of advanced civilian nuclear technology will enable India to reduce its dependence on energy imports and devote a greater portion of the resources of its nuclear program to nuclear-weapons development.

Questioned why the US was “rewarding” a country that had exploded nuclear weapons in 1998 in defiance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) with privileged status within the

world nuclear regulatory regime, Bush responded, “things change, times change.”

The president then went on to attack those within the US establishment who oppose the deal because they fear that China will view it as a provocation and that it will undermine Washington’s efforts to rally international support against Iran and North Korea. “There’s some people who just don’t want to change with the time,” complained Bush, after observing that the deal will be difficult to “sell to our Congress”.

No one asked the president the obvious follow-up question: how does the US bid to make nuclear-armed India an exception to the world nuclear regulatory regime square with Washington’s demand that Iran not be allowed to pursue its right, as a signatory of the NPT, to develop all phases of a civilian nuclear program?

According to press reports, Bush and Manmohan Singh had an air of triumph about them when they announced that the nuclear accord had been finalized. Unquestionably, there was a frantic push from both the Bush administration and the Congress Party-led UPA government to conclude a deal during the president’s India visit. Their fear was that it might otherwise unravel in the face of mounting opposition in India and considerable criticism from within the US political elite. Bush’s top aides are reported to have been negotiating the deal by telephone with officials in New Delhi even as they were in the air flying from the US to first Afghanistan and then India.

Although Bush, Manmohan Singh and their officials have been eager to use the term “finalized” in describing the agreement they reached to divide India’s nuclear program into a civilian section that will be subject to international safeguards and inspections and a closed military section, there are in fact many things still to be negotiated.

India will have to work out a special protocol with the IAEA elaborating the safeguards to which its civilian program will be subjected and the Bush administration will have to convince both the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the US Congress to endorse the deal, raising the possibility that at a future point Washington could ask New Delhi for revisions.

China, which recently joined the NSG, responded to the announcement of Bush and Manmohan Singh, by saying that any nuclear deal between India and the US “must conform with provisions of the international non-proliferation regime,” which it clearly does not. Nor is the accord going to find favor in Pakistan, which already fears the ever-growing gap between its and India’s economic and military might. Angered by the US insistence that any exception to the nuclear regulatory regime will be for India and India alone, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf flew to

Beijing last month to discuss increased Chinese assistance for Pakistan's civilian nuclear program.

The *New York Times* and the British-based *Economist* both published editorials this week critical of the Bush administration's attempt to woo India by throwing into question the rules designed by the great powers to preserve their monopoly on nuclear weapons. Declared the *Times*: "President Bush's wrongheaded decision last year to make an end run round the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by agreeing to share civilian nuclear technology with New Delhi took America's contain-China-by-building-up-India-strategy a step too far."

Criticism against the tentative accord reached when Manmohan Singh visited Washington last July had been mounting in India for months. Especially damaging to the government were public warnings by former and even some current leaders of India's nuclear program that the US was using the negotiations to emasculate India's nuclear-weapons capability and make its nuclear program dependent on US technology. There was also widespread outrage over Washington's use of the deal to bully India into joining the US-European Union orchestrated gang-up against Iran at the IAEA.

Official details of the final agreement have yet to be announced. But press reports indicate that ultimately Washington backed off some of its demands. India's fast breeder research program will not be made subject to international safeguards and inspection. Whereas the Bush administration had initially demanded that 18 of India's 22 operational or under-construction power reactors be designated part of India's civilian nuclear program, it eventually agreed to 14. This is reputedly the same number that India's former coalition government, led by the Hindu Supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party, had proposed when it broached the idea of a nuclear accord with the Bush administration in 2002.

Two points need to be made about Washington's apparent retreat: it underscores the Bush administration's anxiety to bind India more closely to its geo-political strategy; developments in the weeks after last July's initial Indo-US nuclear accord quickly showed that the Bush administration had bargained for things that were not laid down in any public text. It repeatedly and publicly tied ratification of the accord to India falling into line with the US in its confrontation with Iran at the IAEA and sought to bully India into abandoning its plans to build a pipeline with Pakistan to bring Iranian gas to the subcontinent.

In its Friday edition, the *Hindu*, which had been among the most outspoken critics of the US's demands in the negotiations over the nuclear accord, carries an editorial titled, "A Hard Bargain." It expresses the naïve belief that Thursday's accord came with no strings attached: "It is important that the nuclear deal not be turned into the basis for effecting a broader strategic alliance between the US and India," writes the *Hindu*. "Washington needs to make the nuclear deal happen as much as New Delhi does and there is no need for the Manmohan Singh government to entertain any American suggestions that India can now do without an energy relationship with Iran."

The US, under the Bush administration, has emerged as the most aggressive and reckless force in world geo-politics, as the American ruling elite seeks to use its military might to offset the

decline in its world economic position. If it is willing to press for an exception to be made for India in the world nuclear regulatory regime, it is because it aims through the selective use of the carrot and stick to tie India to its geo-political strategy and ambitions.

Significantly, at the joint press conference with Manmohan Singh, Bush launched into a bitter tirade against Myanmar's human rights abuses, ignoring the obvious irony that he will soon fly to Pakistan to sing the praises of the military strongman Pervez Musharraf. In an event, Bush's intervention was clearly aimed at pressuring India not to pursue its plans to seek energy from Myanmar.

Manmohan Singh, for his part, was at pains to curry favor with Bush. He lauded the US president for his leadership in securing the nuclear accord, then took up the mantra Bush and his administration have invoked in justifying their wars of aggression and assault on democratic rights. "President Bush is admired for his strong position on terrorism," said Singh, "and I was particularly pleased that we agreed on the need to root out terrorism, of which India has been a major victim."

On Wednesday, when it was still not clear the nuclear deal would be reached, Condoleezza Rice was at pains to insist that Bush's visit was not just about the nuclear accord: "It's business development, it's science and technology development, going back to agriculture. This is a very broad relationship that is deepening and I think benefiting the world as it did ... [with] the tsunami, as it demonstrated in the IAEA board of governors, where India joined the consensus on Iran. So there's a lot that is going to be cemented here."

Indeed, the Bush administration and the UPA government, and US and Indian capital, are intent on collaborating evermore closely in the dismantling of all barriers to the exploitation of India's human and natural resources. In addition to the nuclear accord, Bush and Singh announced a series of agreements to expand trade military, and scientific ties, including one that will give agri-business giants like Monsanto a role in shaping India's agricultural research. The *World Socialist Web Site* will comment further on these agreements in the coming days.

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