

US “coerced” India over Iran

Former Bush appointee boasts

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In a public speech Stephen G. Rademaker, a former US Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation and International Security, boasted in New Delhi last week that the United States “coerced” India into voting against Iran at recent International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meetings and warned that Washington may soon present India with an even starker choice.

Rademaker delivered an address to the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, a “think-tank” funded by the Indian Ministry of Defence, February 15 on “Iran, North Korea and the future of the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty)”.

The former Bush administration official claimed that the July 2005 Indo-US nuclear accord had resulted in a big change in India’s attitude towards what he termed “non-proliferation.” Translated into plain English this means that the US has made the nuclear agreement contingent upon India siding with the US in its attempt to bully Iran over its nuclear program and fully intends to use the accord to exact further concessions from India.

Commenting on the Indian votes at IAEA meetings in September 2005 and February 2006, Rademaker declared, “The best illustration of this is the two votes India cast against Iran at the IAEA. I am the first person to admit that the votes were coerced.”

Rademaker’s provocative comments were initially reported only in the *Hindu* of February 16. A day later, the *Times of India* also carried the story.

As of the beginning of this week, there had been no response to Rademaker’s comments either from officials of the Indian government or from the leaders of the opposition parties, including the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), which, even while providing India’s Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government with the parliamentary votes needed to remain in office, has sharply criticized India’s two votes against Iran and warned that Washington is seeking to use the Indo-US nuclear accord to harness India to its predatory and bellicose geo-political designs.

The current US ambassador to India, David Mulford, has, for his part, hastened to distance the US government from Rademaker. Said Mulford, “It has always been the US position that India will make decisions on the Iran issue based on its

own national interests. We respect the government of India’s decisions on this matter. Rademaker is not a US official and the statements attributed to him are inaccurate.”

Such denials coming from an official who has himself become notorious for his repeated provocative interventions in Indian affairs carry little, if any, weight. In January 2006, Mulford publicly warned that the Indo-US nuclear accord would “die” if India failed to support the US position against Iran at the upcoming IAEA meeting.

Earlier this month, as India’s External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukerjee was departing for a two-day trip to Tehran, Mulford told the press that he was watching the visit with “interest.” The ambassador added that he wanted to ascertain if any Indo-Iranian agreements would result in India violating the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act—US legislation that threatens any foreign firm that invests more than \$40 million in the development of Iran’s petroleum resources with financial penalties.

The Bush administration has repeatedly publicly urged India to forego plans to build a pipeline to import Iranian natural gas via Pakistan. New Delhi, however, sees this project as both economically and politically rewarding, since it would underpin the current attempt to conclude a comprehensive peace settlement with Pakistan. The pipeline deal was high on Mukherjee’s agenda for his Tehran visit. Earlier this month Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who at the time of the nuclear accord with the US had initially dismissed the pipeline deal as a far-off venture, enthusiastically touted its benefits.

Under the Indo-US nuclear accord, Washington has pledged to help forge a unique status for India within the world nuclear regulatory regime, making it eligible to receive civilian nuclear fuel and technology from the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group even though it is not a signatory to the NPT.

Such “special status” is highly coveted by the Indian elite for several reasons: because it exemplifies the US’s readiness to forge a strategic partnership with India and, in the words of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, “help” India to become a “world-power”; because India is hoping to reduce its dependence on energy imports by developing nuclear power; and because access to civilian nuclear fuel and technology exports will enable India to concentrate the resources of its own

nuclear program on building its nuclear-weapon arsenal.

While the Indian elite looks at the nuclear accord as propelling it into the realm of a world-power, the Bush administration and US geo-political establishment by contrast see it as cementing a strategic partnership in which India will play the role of satrap—that is, India will be expected to accommodate to and serve US imperialist ambitions in the Middle East and Asia.

“In the end,” continued Redemaker, “India did not vote the wrong way.” India’s votes against Iran had “paved the way for the Congressional vote on the civilian nuclear proposal last year”—a reference to legislation adopted by the US Congress last December that amends the 1952 US Energy Act so as to facilitate the Bush administration plan to grant India “special status” within the world nuclear regulatory framework.

But, and this was no doubt the key point of Redemaker’s “non-official” speech, the Bush administration is far from finished with its efforts to “coerce” India into doing its bidding against Iran: “More is going to be required [of India] because the problems of Iran and North Korea have not been solved.”

Redemaker then repeated the Bush Administration’s charge that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, without presenting a shred of proof.

He asserted that the “international community” will have to implement additional measures to persuade Iran to change course, while observing that Russia, whose president just visited India so as to revitalize the longstanding Indo-Russian military and geo-political alliance, is not fully siding with the US against Tehran.

“Whether there will be more UN sanctions or more measures taken outside the UN context, we’ll have to see,” Redemaker said.

India’s UPA government and the Indian elite find themselves on a strategic tightrope.

They have pursued closer relations with China, Russia and Iran, even while accepting “favours” from the US, which has made no secret of the fact that it expects India to support its efforts to politically and economically isolate Iran and to serve as a strategic counterweight to a rising China.

India’s elite has gambled that it can navigate through the shifting and increasingly turbulent seas of world politics, but now finds itself facing the imminent prospect of having to make a choice with tremendous long-term implications for India’s role in world affairs and its access to the energy reserves needed to fuel India’s economic growth.

New Delhi’s suggestions that it could act as a mediator between Tehran and Washington have been met by the Bush administration with a contemptuous silence. Instead, as indicated by Mulford’s recent remarks, the US is stepping up its efforts to scuttle the Iranian pipe line project.

Tehran, meanwhile, has sweetened its offer to India. It is guaranteeing the sale to India of natural gas at half the current international price. The attraction of the project for India is

compounded by Russian President Putin’s recent announcement that the state-owned Gazprom energy monopoly is ready to take a leading role in financing and building the India-Pakistan-Iran pipeline.

“[If] the U.N. Security Council acts against Iran,” Redemaker told his New Delhi audience last week, “this would make things easier for countries like India. But if things go in the direction of increasing economic pressure by a coalition of countries like the US, Europe and Japan, India will have to make a choice.

“It is India’s prerogative to decide, but should it [not join], it would be a big mistake and a lost opportunity.”

Redemaker claimed that for India to pullout of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project “would send a strong message to Iran, while not hurting India’s economic interests.”

Ominously he continued: “[What] happens if there is an incident in Kashmir?” implying that the US would not hesitate to utilize the Indo-Pakistani geo-political rivalry to bully India to fall into line.

These threats were combined with flattery. Redemaker urged India’s elite to stop thinking of themselves as leaders of a “third-world-country” and instead align themselves with the “first-world,” i.e. the traditional imperialist powers, the US, the EU countries and Japan.

The stark choices facing the Indian elite with respect to its relations with US will undoubtedly cause great turmoil and much soul-searching within the Indian ruling elite.

For the international working class, Washington’s campaign to intimidate India in preparation for further aggression against Iran must be seen as testament to the recklessness and desperation of a US elite intent on averting the erosion of its economic power through wars and threats of wars and as underlining, therefore, the urgency of reviving the antiwar movement on a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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