

US steps up pressure on India to wrap-up Indo-US nuclear treaty

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With less than a year remaining in the Bush administration's term in office, the US political establishment is showing increasing signs of anxiety about the progress India has made in finalizing the Indo-US civilian nuclear treaty. Both senior Republicans and Democrats have hailed the treaty as the cornerstone of an Indo-US "strategic" and "global" partnership.

The Telegraph, a Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) daily, reported on February 10 the mood in the US government as follows: "Ending weeks of silence on the Indo-US nuclear deal, America's pointmen on the nuclear issue in both Washington and New Delhi today launched a concerted, two-pronged effort to get India to pursue the deal without further delay."

The "pointmen" the article was referring to are US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, who led the US team in its negotiations with India's Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government, and the US ambassador to India, David Mulford.

"We don't have all the time in the world, particularly since this is an election year... and so we hope very much that this process can now be expedited," stated Burns.

Mulford was even blunter. During an interview on Indian television he said that if the nuclear treaty is "not processed in the present (US) Congress it is unlikely that this deal will be offered again to India. It certainly would not be revived and offered by any administration, Democratic or Republican" before 2010.

The following week a delegation of three influential US senators—2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph Biden, and Republican Foreign Relations Committee member Chuck Hagel—brought the same message to India. "If you don't soon conclude the deal, the [upcoming presidential] elections in the US will have a bearing on the legislative clock," said Biden.

The senators urged New Delhi to conclude mandatory agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group no later than the beginning of June, so as to enable the US Congress to ratify the Indo-US nuclear treaty by July. After then, they claimed, the US presidential election campaign will effectively paralyze congressional legislative action.

The UPA government has encountered many obstacles in negotiating a "safeguard" agreement with the IAEA. For months, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front, which has been sustaining the UPA government in power since May 2004,

opposed the opening of talks with the IAEA. And while last November the Stalinists did finally allow the UPA government to initiate negotiations with the IAEA, they continue to say that they will bring down the government should it implement the treaty, because the treaty would entangle India in Washington's predatory foreign policy.

Negotiations with the IAEA have also proven difficult. Despite four rounds of negotiations with the IAEA, New Delhi has been unable to conclude an agreement.

Once a deal with the IAEA is reached India will still have to negotiate a waiver from the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), before it will be allowed to partake in nuclear trade. The NSG's support is by no means guaranteed, since allowing India to engage in nuclear trade would give it special status within the world nuclear regulatory regime as a state that obtained nuclear weapons in defiance of the five "recognized nuclear powers" and continues to refuse to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The US senators warned that if the Indo-US civil nuclear deal is not consummated, it will impact negatively on the Indo-US relations. "If the US is not able to ratify [the treaty]," said Biden, "it might be interpreted as rejection and lack of trust in India and that will be a shame because we want to tell you that we trust India and we value this relationship very much."

Following on the senators' heels, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates arrived in India February 27 for a two-day visit and promptly exerted still more pressure on the Indian government. "The clock," said Gates, "is ticking in terms of how much time is available to get all the different aspects of an agreement implemented."

Denying that he was interfering in the internal politics of India, Gates declared that the civilian nuclear cooperation deal "serves the best interests of both countries" and would have "positive global consequences."

From the standpoint of US imperialism, the "positive" global consequences of the Indo-US nuclear deal would be:

- * The forging of a strategic relationship with India, through which the US would be well-placed to transform India into a junior partner and ensnare the country in its imperialist geo-political designs in Asia, including domination of Mid-East oil and gas reserves; recruiting India into an anti-Iran alliance; checkmating Russia in Central Asia; and, most importantly, combating China's growing influence.

- * The opening up to US arms and weapons-systems

manufacturers of the huge Indian

market for weapons, till now dominated by Russia. Penetrating this market would not only allow the US military-industrial complex to rake in huge profits, but would also have the added benefit of tying India even more tightly to US foreign policy interests by making the Indian military dependent upon the US for parts.

* To position US energy companies to garner a large share of the tens of billions of dollars India plans to spend in the coming decades on civilian nuclear technology and reactors.

Despite the threats of the Stalinist Left-Front to bring down the Congress-led UPA, there is every indication that Congress Party leaders will forge ahead with the deal, for they believe it offers India great benefits. It would end the more than three decades-old US-led international embargo on nuclear trade with India. It would provide de facto recognition of India as nuclear-weapons state and allow India to concentrate more of the resources of its indigenous nuclear program on developing its nuclear arsenal. In pursuing the deal, Washington has made clear that it recognizes India's aspirations to be a world power and that it has jettisoned any conception of Indo-Pakistani "parity."

As for the US's plans to use the deal to bring India into its geo-political orbit, the Indian government and much of India's geo-political-military establishment harbors the belief, or at least the hope, that India will be able to offset US pressure by simultaneously pursuing close relations with China and Russia, as well as the European Union and Japan.

On February 26, *The Telegraph* published an article entitled "Countdown to nuke D-Day after budget" that reported the political designs of the Congress-led UPA as follows: "The core of the Manmohan Singh government has resolved that it would cement an Indo-US strategic partnership before the end of its term, trashing opposition from Left parties and reservations about the Indo-US nuclear deal among some constituents of the UPA."

The Congress-led UPA, in keeping with its plans to challenge the Left Front over the nuclear issue, last week presented a populist "election" budget that boosted spending on health care and education and offered debt relief to 40 million poor farmers.

India's corporate elite is also strongly supportive of the UPA pressing forward with the nuclear deal with the US. The *Times of India* published an editorial February 22 entitled "We Won't Get A Better Deal."

The *Times* editorial lauded the "far -reaching changes in US-India relations" during George W. Bush's presidency. "Whatever the international criticism of President George Bush, his presidency will be regarded as a period of far-reaching changes in US-India relations. The Bush presidency saw a historic delinking of US relations with India from those with Pakistan. ...

"[The US] has sought to complement rather than complicate our efforts to improve relations with neighbours like Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"Bush is the first US president to declare the importance of India in safeguarding the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and in 'creating a strategically stable Asia.' US technology sanctions against India have been eased in the recent past.

"Outsourcing has grown unhindered. Finally, the nuclear

agreement of July 2005 has provided a window of opportunity to end the international nuclear sanctions India has faced for over three decades now."

The editorial went on to harshly criticize the Stalinist Communist Part of India (Marxist) or CPM, accusing it of doing China's bidding in opposing the nuclear deal with the US. "There seems to be a striking similarity," said the *Times of India*, "between the rhetoric of our communist parties and Chinese statements on the issue. Like the Chinese, our communist parties are opposed to India acquiring or possessing nuclear weapons, despite continuing Chinese assistance to the nuclear weapons and missile programmes of Pakistan."

The reality is that the CPM is a vital prop of the Indian bourgeois state. In opposing the nuclear treaty with the US, it urges the Indian bourgeoisie, in keeping with its traditional "non-aligned" foreign policy, to forge closer relations with Russia and China, so as to promote a "multi-polar" world.

The Congress-led UPA government, in tandem with its burgeoning partnership with the US, has been continuing the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) policy of pursuing closer relations with Israel. Israel is now India's second largest arms supplier; on January 21 India launched an Israeli spy satellite aboard an Indian rocket despite strenuous protests from Iran.

While India has long had close relations with Teheran, since 2005 it has twice buckled under US pressure and voted against Iran at the IAEA. As a result of Washington's opposition, India has also dragged its feet on concluding negotiations with Teheran on a pipeline project that would bring Iranian natural gas to India via Pakistan.

Taking advantage of India's vacillation, the Chinese government has wasted no time in informing Iran that it would be willing to take India's place as the third partner in the proposed pipeline project. Thus the Iranian-Pakistani-Indian pipeline, which was meant to underpin the Indo-Pakistani peace process, could well mutate into an Iranian-Pakistani-Chinese pipeline.

Given the immense difficulty and opposition facing the Indo-US nuclear deal both domestically and internationally, it is entirely possible that the Indian elite could ultimately find itself losing both the nuclear agreement and the Iranian gas pipeline deal.

In any event, as the mounting US pressure for the nuclear deal demonstrates, India—in lockstep with its integration into the world capitalist economy and resulting "rise"—is increasingly being drawn into the struggle amongst the great powers for resources, markets, and military-strategic advantage.



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