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The US-India Civil Nuclear Pact: Policy, Process, And Great Power Politics

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Abstract

This article examines the process through which India and the United States made their bilateral civilian nuclear energy cooperation pact a reality. Using the levels of analysis approach, this article examines the factors that were instrumental in shaping up the nuclear agreement as well as the negotiating process as it evolved in the United States and India with a special focus on how political leaderships in the two states managed domestic opposition to thepact. Subsequently, this article locates the US-India nuclear agreement in the context of the broader theoretical debate in international relations over the role of international institutions in global politics and argues that the successful conclusion of the agreement highlights the importance of strategic considerations in driving the nonproliferation priorities of great powers

Keywords:-*. Non-proliferation, India, United States, Nuclear, Strategic*

Introduction

When US President George W. Bush signed the US-Indian Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Nonproliferation Enhancement Act – the legislation enabling civilian nuclear trade with India – in October 2008, it was not merely the culmination of morethan three years of diplomatic negotiations between the United States and India. It also symbolized a turning point in US-India relations with the two nations deciding toleave their suspicion-ridden past behind and enter into what has been described as a "strategic partnership." The US disagreement with India on its nuclear weapons pro- gram had clouded the relationship between the world's oldest and largest democracieswith India remaining the target of US efforts to "curb, roll back, and eliminate" its nuclear weapons program. Though previous US administrations tried to improve ties with India, they were reluctant to move ahead on the nuclear issue, thereby preventingthe US-India bilateral ties from achieving their full potential. The Bush Administration'sdecision to engage India as a rising global power meant that ending the deadlock over the nuclear question was essential. Toward this end, the political leaderships in Washington and New Delhi had to expend voluminous political capital in the face of strong oppo- sition from various quarters, and had to bridge the gap between America's entrenchednonproliferation policy and India's insistence on insurance against any future negativeturn. The approval of the nuclear deal by the US Congress, however, signifies the broad spectrum of support that the idea of a US-India partnership enjoys in the US polity and society. While the signing of the nuclear pact by the Bush Administration was important, its approval by the US Congress is all the more significant as it implies that the US polity is now ready and willing to trust India as a global partner.

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Yet the passage of the nuclear deal was not an easy one either in the United States or in India as both sides had to reckon with a long, largely negative historical memory. This article examines the process through which the two democracies made the deal a reality. Foreign policy making by democracies is often a long, messy process,and the US-India nuclear deal was no exception. It involved some intense diplomatic bargaining from both sides, but it is clear that the US-India ties will only be much stronger because of the extensive diplomatic energies that this process has consumed. Using the levels of analysis approach, this article examines the factors that wereinstrumental in shaping up the nuclear agreement as well as the negotiating process asit evolved in the United States and India with a special focus on how political leader- ships in the two states managed domestic opposition to the pact. Subsequently, this article locates the US-India nuclear agreement in the context of the broader theoreticaldebate in international relations over the role of international institutions in global politics and argues that the successful conclusion of the agreement highlights the importance of strategic considerations in driving the nonproliferation priorities of great powers.

To address the ubiquitous phenomenon of multiplicity of actors, influences, and processes in international politics, a level-of-analysis (LoA) approach is employed thatanalyzes issues and events in international relations at three different levels: the inter-national system level, the state level, and the individual level.

The individual LoA focuses mostly on the leaders of a state, though personal characteristics of humans may also be examined. This level concerns the perceptions, choices, and actions of individual human beings. The psychological makeup of a state'sleaders, the background, training, and education of the elite of the state, the ideology of the leaders, and their strategies and tactics are some of the variables that are given attention at this level.

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The state LoA looks inside states for the causes of international events. It concernsthe aggregations of individuals, such as interest groups, political organizations, and governmental agencies, within states that influence state actions in the international arena. This level of causation focuses on such aspects as politics and tensions within the state, the prevailing ideologies and belief systems within the state, the groups contending for power within the state, the type of political system, and the influence of non-governmental organizations, special interest groups, and public opinion on state policies. Some other variables that are considered important at this LoA are political institutions, economic structure, and the level of development, history, and culture.

The level of causation focused at the international systemic level examines the impact of an international system on international outcomes. This level is particularlyattentive to the structure of the international system, which is defined by the distributionof relative power capabilities among states. It is the number of great powers or polarityin the international system that defines the structure of the international system that, in turn, affects state behavior.

The US-India nuclear pact is the result of a unique constellation of factors at the systemic, domestic political, and individual level that enabled America and India to chart a new course in their bilateral relationship.

LoA – Structural (International) Factors

The most important determinant has been the changed structural realities as the inter-national system evolved into a unipolar one after the demise of the Soviet Union that liberated Indian and US attitudes toward each other from the structural confines of Cold War realities. India's Cold War foreign policy posture of nonalignment lost its meaning in a world where there were no longer any blocs left to align against. There was one systemic reality, and that was the US preponderance in the global hierarchy. As India pursued economic reforms and moved toward global integration, it was clearthat the United States and India would have to find a modus vivendi for a deeper engagement with each other. As Indian foreign policy priorities changed, US-India cooperation increased on a range of issues. India needed US support for its economic regeneration, and the Clinton Administration viewed India as an emerging success story of globalization. Yet the relations could only go so far in the absence of US re conciliation to India's nuclear status and the inability of the United States to move beyond the India-Pakistan hyphenated relationship in South Asia.

The Indian nuclear tests of 1998, while removing ambiguity about India's nuclear status, further complicated US-India bilateral relations as the Clinton Administration was bound by law to impose sanctions on India for its nuclear testing. It wanted to improve its relations with India and yet did not want to compromise on the goal of nonproliferation. This difficulty was clearly palpable in the protracted negotiations between the Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission and later the Foreign Ministerof India Jaswant Singh and the US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. While in concrete terms, these negotiations achieved little, they set in motion a process that sawUS-India bilateral engagement taking on a new meaning. Mutual trust developed in the US and Indian foreign policy bureaucracies that is so crucial to sustaining high- level political engagements. The visit of President Clinton to India in 2000 and the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership, which was announced by the Indian Prime Ministerand the US President in 2004, also laid the foundation for a dramatic upswing in Indo-US ties.

Structural realists argue that because of the anarchic nature of the international system with no higher authority above the states, distribution of power defined in terms of material capabilities is the most important determinant of state behavior. Whereas, for defensive realists such as Kenneth Waltz, states strive to maintain their power position in the international system, offensive realists such as John Mearsheimer contend that states seek power maximization because that's the best way to ensure their security. The changing balance of power in the Asia-Pacific made the Bush Administration realize the importance of recalibrating its strategic posture vis-à-vis the region. The United States faces a prospect of an emerging power transition involvingChina, and dealing with this is likely to be the most consequential challenge for the USforeign policy in the coming decades. With this in mind, the United States has decided to pursue a policy of engaging China while simultaneously investing in increasing the power of other states located along China's periphery. This has involved not only reinvigorating its existing alliance with Japan but also reaching out to new partners such as India. India, meanwhile, is also gearing up to face China. India and China are two major powers in Asia with global aspirations and some significant conflicting interests. As a result, some amount of friction in their bilateral relationship is inevitable. The geopolitical reality of Asia suggests that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for *Hindi-Chini* to be *bhai-bhai* (brothers) in the foreseeable future. If India and China continue to rise in the next few years, there's a high likelihood of security com- petition between the two regional giants. And if India is serious about its desire to emerge as a major global power, then it will have to tackle the challenge of China's rise. Not only does the extant balance of power in the Asia-Pacific adversely affect Indian interests, but India also views a rising China with its aggregate strength (size, population, and economic capabilities), its geographical proximity, its offensive capabilities, and its offensive intentions as highly threatening. It is to tackle this challenge that Indian foreign policy has been gearing up with its new approach towardthe United States. The Bush Administration transformed the nature of the US-India partnership by advocating civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India, thereby incorporating India into the global nuclear order as well as declaring that the United States is committed to encouraging the growth of India as a great power.

LoA – State (National)-Level Factors

The second factor in the shaping of contemporary Indo-US ties emerges at the domestic political level with the coming into office of the Bush Administration, which had very different notions about global politics from its predecessor, thereby redefining the parameters of US-India bilateral engagement. That India would figure prominently in the Bush Administration's global strategic calculus was made clear by Condoleezza Rice in her *Foreign Affairs* article before the 2000 presidential elections in which she had argued, "There is a strong tendency to conceptually (in America) connect India with Pakistan and to think of Kashmir or the nuclear competition between the two states." She made it clear that India has the potential to become a great power and USforeign policy would do well to take that into account. The Bush Administration, from the very beginning, refused to look at India through the prism of nonproliferationand had viewed India as a natural and strategic ally.

But the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent dramatic changes in US foreign policy prevented the Bush Administration from fully realizing its ambitions vis-à-vis India though bilateral engagement in the areas of counter-terrorism, joint military exercises, and trade continued to expand. It was when Rice became the Secretary of State in 2005 that the United States started evolving a coherent approachin building its ties with India. Rice visited India in March 2005 as part of her Asia tour and put forth "an unprecedented framework for cooperation with India," something that took the Indian government by surprise. While many in India were focused on the future of US-Pakistan ties, Rice transformed the terms of the debate completely byrevealing that the Bush Administration was willing to consider civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India. And a few days later, the State Department announced the administration's new India policy that declared its goal "to help India become a majorworld power in the twenty-first century." And the first step in that direction was removing the age-old distrust that has engendered between the two states on the nuclear issue. It was clear to both the United States and India that the road to a healthy strategicpartnership between the two democracies goes through nuclear energy cooperation.

The Bush Administration's overture to India is also intricately linked to the way it redefined US nonproliferation policy in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. A basictenet of this policy is that there are certain states that cannot be trusted with nuclear weapons technology given the nature of their domestic political regimes. On the otherhand, states such as India, with its impeccable proliferation credentials, should be rewarded for their behavior. As domestic politics of other states became a central con-cern of the United States in recent years, a secular, pluralist, democratic India emergedas an attractive target to be wooed.

On the Indian side, the reflexive anti-Americanism of the past has become much lesspronounced. It is largely confined to the Communist parties while the two main politicalparties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have taken a more pragmaticapproach toward the United States, despite the constraints of coalition politics.

Despite the presence of a range of variables at the domestic political level that moved India and the United States toward a nuclear rapprochement, the actual processof negotiating the deal was a long and tortuous one. The Indo-US nuclear agreement sparked off a heated debate in India, in the United States, and in the larger interna- tional community, given its far-reaching implications not only for the future of the Indo-US relations but also for the global nonproliferation regime. This meant that there were various constituencies with very different agendas that had a stake in the success or failure of this pact, and it was up to the India and US governments to reconcile these often conflicting interests.

International negotiations conducted by liberal democracies are tricky business. AsRobert Putnam puts it, international negotiations are a "two-level game." At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government toadopt favorable policies; at the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Both these levels have to be taken seriously bythe governments if they want to achieve successful outcomes from negotiations. So the best strategy for the executive is to absorb the concerns of societal actors and build coalitions with them at the domestic level, while at the international level, it should tryto implement these concerns without committing to anything that will have deleterious effects at home. Both the India and US governments went about doing exactly thisthough their modus operandi varied greatly.

The Left and the Right of the Indian political spectrum had converged in their opposition to the deal when it was announced initially. The Hindu nationalist BJP, despite being in many ways the driving force behind the US-India rapprochement, made its displea-sure clear with the nuclear pact from the very beginning. It was the former Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who led the opposition arguing that the Indian government had surrendered its right to determine what kind of nuclear deterrent it should have in the future based on its own threat perception. Not only would the new agreement put restrictions on the nuclear research program, Vajpayee argued, but India would also incur huge costs on separating military and civilian nuclear installations. The Left Parties who were part of the ruling coalition, United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and supported the Congress party from the outside, criticized the government for not taking its allies into confidence before striking the nuclear deal with the United States. Theyalso lambasted the government for giving up on India's long-

held policy of nuclear disarmament. The Indian Left had always been very wary of India's close ties with the United States, and the idea of a US-India partnership did not go down well with them. They saw it as a renunciation of India's long-established nonaligned tradition.

However, it was the Indian scientific community whose criticism of the deal was the most difficult for the government to deal with. Significant sections of the Indian scientific community were less than enthusiastic, arguing that the separation of civilian and military facilities would be an onerous task and might have serious repercussions for research and development in weapons development and for production facilities needed for the nuclear deterrent. There were also complaints that the scientific com- munity was completely kept out of the loop while such an important decision had been made to seal this deal with the United States. For long, it seemed as if the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) in India had not reconciled to the deal as it continued to be reluctant in coming out with a credible plan of separating India's civilian and military nuclear facilities, and several rounds of talks between India and the United States failed primarily due to DAE's strong resistance to the deal, especially its opposition to putting its fast breeder program on the civilian list.

The Indian government went systematically to deal with the concerns of all the major domestic constituencies that had a stake in the outcome of the negotiations. The most high profile was its engagement with the scientific establishment. The scientific establishment, as represented by India's DAE, was not very enthusiastic about the deal, especially about US insistence that India put its fast-breeder reactors under safe-guards. Fast-breeder reactors use spent fuel from heavy water reactors to produce large amounts of plutonium which can be used both for power generation and making nuclear weapons. The Indian scientific establishment had built India's nuclear pro- gram in the face of extreme American pressure and were suspicious of US motives. America's past record with the Indian nuclear scientific establishment was not easy to relegate to history. Given the stature the Indian scientists in the DAE enjoy in the Indian society and polity, their opposition would have been enough to kill the deal, and so the Indian government worked hard to assuage their concerns. And this scientific opposition also helped the Indian government in its negotiations with the United States.

The Indian government was being attacked from both the Left and the Right, and in order to protect its flanks, it had to tread very cautiously with the negotiations. It pursued a carefully crafted negotiating strategy where even as it was dealing with its US interlocutors, it was engaged in a sustained dialogue with major domestic players. The explicit rejection of the idea of putting breeder reactors under safeguards by Anil Kakodkar, chairman of India's Atomic Energy Commission, became a leverage that the Indian government was able to use in its dealings with the Bush Administration. The Indian Prime Minister took a gamble, and even before the deal was finalized, he declared in the Indian parliament that the fast-breeder reactors would not be put in the civilian list and so would not be open to international inspections. This helped him in getting an openly defiant nuclear establishment on board.

The nuclear agreement ultimately hinged on the ability of the Indian government to come up with a credible plan to separate its tightly entwined civilian and military nuclear facilities acceptable to the United States. After some tough negotiations over a period of seven months that were continuing even as the US President landed in New Delhi on March 1, 2006, the two states did manage to arrive at an agreement. India agreed that 14 of its 22 nuclear reactors would be classified as civilian and would be open to international safeguards. The other reactors, including the fast-breeder reactors, would remain as military facilities, thereby not subject to international inspections. The accord also allows India to build future breeder reactors and decide whether to keep them in or out of the international inspections regime. India has accepted safeguards in perpetuity on its civilian nuclear reactors on the basis of a reciprocal commitment by the United States to guarantee unlimited nuclear fuel supply to India for its civilian program. Unlike other nuclear weapons states, however, India will not have the right to pull out any of its reactors once they have been put under safeguards. In many ways, the separation plan tried to strike a judicious balance between India's long-term energy and security interests and the global community's expectation that a substantial segment of Indian nuclear capabilities should be outside the purview of military use.

The Bush Administration and the Congress

The unenthusiastic initial reception that the nuclear deal received in the US Congress was striking, given the fact that strengthening US-India bilateral ties was an idea that enjoyed widespread support in the US polity. While President Bush himself took the lead in briefing members of the Congress about the pact, it was made clear to him that it would be a tough sell on Capitol Hill. The US Congress' negative reaction had a lot to do with its perception that the Bush Administration had not involved it in the pro- cess before finalizing the deal with India. While the administration may have had good reasons for not doing so, the Congress was ready to pay back in the same coin when the deal came to it for ratification. If international negotiations conducted by liberal democracies tend to succeed only if the executive is able to absorb the concerns of societal groups and build coalitions with them at the domestic level while implementing those concerns at the international level, then the Bush Administration had clearly not done an effective job of keeping Congressional concerns in mind.
Since foreign policy in the Bush Administration's second term was being largely driven by Condoleezza Rice and a close circle of advisors, the concerns of the US Congress and the foreign policy bureaucracy with regard to the nuclear deal

were ignored. This failure to consult with the Congress or to build support for the agreement with the bureaucracy meant that the selling of the nuclear agreement became allthe more difficult. And the fact that President Bush was politically extremely vulnerable did not help matters. Moreover, it has also been suggested that some members of the Bush Administration, including Robert Joseph, the undersecretary of state, David Addington, the chief of staff to the vice president, and John Rood at the National Security Council, were intent on sabotaging the deal by motivated leaks to the press about India's nuclear ambitions as they were apparently not happy with the final agreement with India.

Once the Bush Administration realized that pushing the bill through the Congress was going to be harder than expected, it went all out in wooing the members of the Congress. The promise by the administration that it would submit the final agreementto Congress for a vote was significant in generating support for the deal. While many US lawmakers realized India's growing strategic importance and its respectable track record in nuclear nonproliferation, they were finding it difficult to make an exception in India's case as it would establish a precedent and open the United States to chargesthat it was not committed to the nonproliferation regime. While most Republican members of the Congress were circumspect, many Democratic members made itabundantly clear that the agreement was highly controversial, and even members of the India caucus were restrained in their views.

The hearings in the US Congress on the Indo-US nuclear pact also brought to light the difficulties involved in its ratification. Most members of the US Congress struggledwith the question of whether the net impact of this agreement on US nonproliferationpolicy would be positive or negative. The majority of the experts empanelled by the House Committee on International Relations argued that the deal would weaken the international nonproliferation regime. Only a few, such as Ashley Tellis, had dared tosuggest that bringing "India into the global nonproliferation through a lasting bilateral agreement that defines clearly enforceable benefits and obligations, not merely strengthens American efforts to stem further proliferation but also enhances US national security."

Senator Richard Lugar, who was chairing the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, made it a point to mention in his opening statement that India's nuclear recordwith the international community had been unsatisfying and that India had "violated bilateral pledges it made to Washington not to use US-supplied nuclear materials for weapon purposes." He forcefully reminded everyone that an implementation of the Indo-US nuclear accord requires congressional consent and that it would be his committee and the US Congress that would determine "what effect the joint statement will have on US efforts to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction."

After the United States accepted India's plan to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities, there were complaints that Bush had given away far too much inthe nuclear agreement with India in return for very little. Some, like DemocraticRepresentative Edward Markey of Massachusetts, were hyperbolic in claiming that the accord "undermines the security not only of the United States but of the rest of the world." While some asked for a detailed briefing from the Bush Administration on theimplications of the nuclear deal for the nuclear nonproliferation regime, others wanted the administration to show Congress how this deal would make the United States more secure. The focus of the US Congress, at least initially, was largely on the consequences of this pact for the nuclear nonproliferation regime, especially at a time whenUS foreign policy was trying to grapple with Iran and North Korea. Some claimed that the deal with India was exactly the wrong message to send at a time, when Washingtonand its European allies were asking the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)to refer Iran's case to the UN Security Council for further action. Iran had attackedthe Indo-US nuclear deal in an attempt to counter international pressure on its own nuclear program. Iran's Chief Nuclear Negotiator Ali Larijani referred to this deal when he argued that the United States enjoys extensive relations with India in the nuclear field despite India's nuclear weapons program. He went on to claim that such a "dual standard" was detrimental to global security even though India, unlike Iran, is not a signatory to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and having signed the treaty, Iran was obligated to comply with its international commitments in a transparent manner.

There were also concerns about the implications of this deal for India's nuclear weapons program. This deal might allow India to ramp up its weapons production as the supply of nuclear fuel to India would free up India's existing capacity to produce plutonium and highly enriched uranium for its nuclear weapons stockpile. The non- proliferation community also remained unconvinced considering that India has decided not to accept safeguards on the prototype fast-breeder reactor and the fast- breeder test reactor, as well as on the reprocessing and enrichment capabilities associatedwith the fuel cycle for its strategic program.

The Bush Administration had to convince the US Congress that the basic bargain of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, as exemplified by the NPT, would not come under strain due to the agreement with India, and that US-India strategic partnership would get a boost with this pact. On its part, India decided to shut down the Cirus reactor permanently by 2010 and to shift the Apsara reactor from the Bhabha Atomic Research Center. This was done partly to assuage some of the concerns ofthe nonproliferation lobby that has long blamed India for going back on its word by diverting weapons-grade plutonium to the Pokhran nuclear test of 1974.

In the ultimate analysis, the deal's fate depended on the Bush Administration's determination to get the bill signed, sealed,

and delivered. It succeeded in its endeavorwhen, days after the Republicans lost their majorities in both Houses of the US Congress, the Senate overwhelmingly approved the nuclear deal. After reconciling theHouse and Senate versions of the bill, the Henry Hyde US-India Peaceful AtomicEnergy Cooperation Act of 2006 was signed by President Bush, marking a rare foreignpolicy success for the Bush Administration at a time when it was suffering enormous setbacks across the globe.

India's Coalition Troubles

For the Indian government, the last leg was the most difficult one as it could not rally its coalition partners, especially the Left Parties, in support of the deal. The danger remained that if it pushed too hard, the government might fall. Whereas the Bush Administration was able to push the deal successfully through the US Congress by putting its political weight behind it, it was in New Delhi that the deal came close to unraveling. India's political waffling became a symbol of the fragility of India's systemof coalition politics and the government's evident inability to stand up for what it clearly believed to be in the country's best interests.

After months of indecisiveness, the Indian government took the stand that it was ready to sacrifice a few more months in office by going ahead with the deal and forcingits main coalition partners, the Communist Parties, to withdraw support. This becamepossible only after the government managed to secure the support of a regional party to retain its majority in the Indian parliament. Such conviction along with the concomitant political maneuvering was long overdue. While the government has had more than two years to bring the deal to fruition, it repeatedly postponed making tough decisions so as not to upset the political applecart in New Delhi. And when itdid decide to finalize the pact, it was forced to resort to all sorts of deal making to save the government that ended up sullying the relatively clean image of the Prime Minister himself with accusations of vote buying and shady corporate lobbying flying thick andfast. The government did survive, but its inability to make decisions at the right time has raised profound doubts about the nations' decision-making process being able to leverage India's growing capabilities to its advantage.

Although it was to Prime Minister Singh's credit that he decided to go for one of the most far-reaching decisions that any Indian government has ever made in the realmof foreign policy, his political management of this issue left much to be desired. It is not clear why he did not take his party into confidence, as the lack of enthusiasm for the nuclear pact within his own party had been evident as soon as the deal was signed.There was a mistaken belief in sections of the government that the Indian Communistparties would somehow, through logical reasoning, come around to support the pact if only to keep the governing coalition afloat.

From the very beginning, however, the Communist parties, which have historicallydemonstrated strong consistency in their foreign policy, had made it clear that they would never support the deal. The Communists do not support India's nuclear pro- gram and have remained the most rabid anti-American segment of the Indian polity. Thus, the Indian government's reliance on the Left to carry a deal that transforms the verynature of US-India partnership forward went against the grain of what the Indian Left hastraditionally stood for. The Communists, given their knee-jerk anti-Americanism, failed to appreciate the value of ending India's nuclear isolation and, consequently, found themselves out of sync with the broader centrist opinion in the country.

It is possible that the government was relying on the main opposition, the BJP, to support the deal at the eleventh hour. It was, after all, the BJP-led government that decided, after conducting nuclear tests in 1998, to commence negotiations with the United States on a broad framework that could bring India into the global nuclear regime – a government that was reportedly very close to signing a deal with the UnitedStates itself. But the BJP could not let go of an opportunity to humiliate the governmentand decided to oppose the pact to gain an electoral advantage over its nearest rival. Forthe BJP, the deal was also a reminder of its own deficiencies in negotiating a similar pact with the United States in return for much less, and so it continued to suggest thatit would negotiate a better deal if it came to power.

Realizing that time was running out, Prime Minister Singh finally decided to put his own prestige on the line to get the unqualified backing of his own party and to push the deal forward. This forced his party to reach consensus despite misgivings about the possibility of going to polls amidst rising inflationary pressures. But India had only a limited amount of time if it wanted to get the deal signed and sealed beforeBush left office. There were considerable doubts if the next US administration would be as keen as the present one about giving the same terms and conditions to India.
The fracas over the US-India nuclear deal made it clear that the Indian political scene stands divided on fundamental foreign policy choices. Perhaps for the first time in India's history, foreign policy differences between various political formations seemedas stark as they were on the nuclear pact though ultimately the Indian government's victory in the Parliament gave it the political momentum necessary to carry the deal toits logical conclusion.

LoA – Individual-Level Factors

A third factor that is often neglected but has been no less crucial in shaping the trajectory of Indo-US nuclear pact is the role

of key individuals. The most important role has been played by the US President himself, who while being tutored for his presidential campaign, was supposed to have inquired as to why India had not received priority inUS foreign policy despite being the world's largest democracy. And as he got a chance to alter some of the basic tenets of US foreign policy after September 11, 2001,it is not surprising that India received his administration's due attention. Despite being consumed by the "global war on terror," the Bush Administration did not flinch from making hard decisions on India. In many ways, the US-India relationship might turn out to be one of the most significant achievements of the Bush Administration's foreign policy. Bush's single-handed reversal of the entrenched US hostility toward India on Kashmir and nonproliferation makes him one of the most significant players in this dynamic. Whether it was preventing the nonproliferation lobby from wreckingthe deal or using his clout to bring recalcitrant nations in the Nuclear Suppliers Group(NSG) around, Bush was ready to spend any amount of political capital to build a new partnership with India. He pressed the US Congress to approve the 123 agreement on short notice despite being consumed by an unprecedented financial crisis.

Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, turned Bush's vision into a reality. Though initially criticized for not keeping the US Congress in the loop, she made sure that the broader strategic vision behind the deal was made clear to those in the US Congress who were skeptical of the deal. Other important actors on the US side included former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, who led the US team in all its negotiations with India, including the 123 agreement, and despitefeeling frustrated at various points, never wavered in his belief about the necessity of concluding the agreement; the US Ambassador to the Delhi, David Mulford, who was Washington's interface with Delhi, and whose personal relationship with Bush ensured that momentum was never lost; former US Ambassador to India, Robert D. Blackwill; and his advisor, Ashley J. Tellis.

During Bush's first term, Blackwill forced many positive changes in US policydespite stiff bureaucratic resistance with Tellis as his advisor. Blackwill had advised Bush during his presidential campaign and became the US Ambassador to India in 2001 after Bush's election. Animated by his conviction that India should be taken seriously by US policymakers, especially as a counterweight to China's growing power, he pushed for closer ties with India. On two sensitive issues – India's nuclear aspirations and terrorism – Blackwill made the first significant moves. The economic sanctions imposed on India after the 1998 nuclear tests were lifted, and India was seen as a responsible nuclear actor, not as a nuclear renegade whose policies threatened theentire nonproliferation regime. Blackwill also made it clear that the fight against international terrorism would not be won until terrorism against India ended. In this, he was ably assisted by Ashley Tellis who became a valuable bridge between India and the United States because of his deep understanding of both countries. Tellis has played a vital role in making the US public and decision-making establishment under- stand the nature of the Indian nuclear program. His seminal work on India's Nuclear Posture argued that India's emergence as a true nuclear weapon power will be a slow, gradual, and distinctive process due to a range of factors that include economic and developmental constraints and India's view of nuclear weapons as "pure deterrents" rather than as war-fighting instruments. This book went a long way in reducing the paranoia in the West that had been generated by India's nuclear tests in 1998.
Later, in a report titled, "India as a New Global Power: An Action Agenda for the United States," Tellis went on to argue that the United States should start treating India as an Asian superpower and must shed old inhibitions because it is in India's interest to do so. This report, in many ways, foreshadowed the Bush Administration'spolicies toward India. Tellis deserves credit for not only making an intellectual case ingiving shape to this deal in the face of grave opposition but also effectively influencingthe policy process in Washington – even as Blackwill went on to join the lobbyingfirm Barbour, Griffith, & Rogers which helped to get the US-India nuclear deal through the US Congress.

The role of key individuals in India in the successful conclusion of the nuclear pact is equally significant. The Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took a bold gamble with this pact, and it was his resolve in the face of daunting political odds that kept the momentum going throughout on the Indian side. He had a personal stake in this agreement as he wanted to build his legacy on the nuclear deal. He put at risk his integrity andhis image as a clean politician to get this deal through the Indian Parliament. The Indian Prime Minister was assisted by a set of people who were equally determined tosee the deal through. This group included the External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee who not only dealt with coalition partners but also kept the bureaucratic momentum going; the National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan who was Singh's point man for negotiations; the Indian Ambassador to the United States, Ronen Sen who was a critical link between the United States and Indian bureaucracies; the PrimeMinister's Special Envoy Shyam Saran who maintained contacts with all the major nuclear powers throughout the negotiation process; the Foreign Secretary Shiv ShankarMenon who was the government's link to the scientific community; the Chief of the DAE, Anil Kakodkar whose initial reservations about the deal strengthened the government's position vis-à-vis its US interlocutors; and former Joint Secretary (Americas) in the External Affairs Ministry, S. Jaishankar who laid the technical groundwork for these negotiations.

The role of all these individuals, especially those on the US side, becomes even more important because of the stark contrast it represents with the key personalities inthe Obama Administration. While Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton supported thenuclear pact as senators, many important members of the Democratic Party foreign policy establishment were strongly opposed to the deal. One of them, Ellen O. Tauscher, has been appointed as the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, and this can have implications for India on the proliferation front. She has

described India as a "country with a dismal record of nonproliferation," which had been "denied access to the market for three decades and for good reason." Though the Obama Administration has publicly assured India that it will fulfill its commitments under the agreement, India is likely to come under pressure with regard to its opposition to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Material Control Treaty (FMCT) that the new administration considers one of its top-most foreign policy priorities.

So we find that significant factors were at play at various levels – the systemic level,the domestic political level, and the individual level. This extraordinary convergence laid the foundation for the US-India civilian nuclear energy cooperation pact that is asremarkable for the way it signals a revolutionary transformation in US-India relationsas it is for the manner in which it transforms the global nuclear discourse. It was duringthe visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the United States in July 2005 that the Bush Administration declared its ambition to achieve full civil nuclear energy cooperation with India as part of its broader goals of promoting nuclear power and achieving nuclear security. In pursuit of this objective, the Bush Administration agreed to "seek agreement from the US Congress to adjust US laws and policies," and to "work with friends and allies to adjust international regimes to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation and trade with India, including but not limited to expeditious consideration of fuel supplies for safeguarded nuclear reactors at Tarapur." India, on its part, promised "to assume the same responsibilities and practices and acquire the same benefits and advantages of other leading countries with advanced nuclear technology."

The Indo-US nuclear pact has redefined the rules of the global nuclear regime by underlining India's credentials as a responsible nuclear state that should be integratedinto the global nuclear order. It creates a major exception to the US prohibition ofnuclear assistance to any country that does not accept international monitoring of all its nuclear facilities. The Indian Prime Minister's visit to the United States wasfollowed by the visit of the US President to New Delhi in 2006, and together they began a new phase in the often turbulent bilateral relationship between the two states. The fundamental difficulty in negotiating the pact was due to the struggle between the two competing imperatives of US foreign policy: great power politics versusnuclear nonproliferation. Whereas the Bush Administration viewed the pact primarilyas a means to build a strategic partnership with India, many in the US Congress wouldsupport it only to the extent it contributed to the nonproliferation objectives. Similarly,while the Indian government also viewed the nuclear deal as a means to reorient itsforeign policy priorities and enter the global nuclear mainstream, its political critics viewed it as a ploy by the United States to constrain India's nuclear options.

This nuclear agreement is about much more than mere nuclear technicalities. It is about the emergence of a new configuration in global balance of power, thereby highlighting how strategic considerations drive the nonproliferation priorities of great powers. Nuclear weapons states have always subordinated their nonproliferationagenda to their strategic interests. The Bush Administration believed that it is in the strategic interest of the United States for India to emerge as a major global player, andthe nuclear agreement is merely a means toward that end. Global political realities seem to have, once again, trumped the institutional imperatives of the nuclear nonpro-liferation regime.

International Institutions in International Relations

There is a long-standing debate in the international relations literature about the effectiveness of international institutions in global politics. The role of international institutions in facilitating cooperation among nations has long inspired a lively debatebetween neoliberal institutionalists who see institutions playing a significant role andneorealists who consider international institutions as essentially irrelevant. While realists see the structural assumption of anarchy putting severe constraints on state behavior, liberal institutionalists have tended to argue that the constraining effects of anarchy can be mitigated, primarily by institutions. While both approaches believe that international cooperation is possible, for the realists, international cooperation isharder to achieve, difficult to maintain, and more dependent on state power than liberals tend to accept.

Building on the work by rational choice theorists, Robert Keohane argued in the mid-1980s that nations would be better off coordinating their policies if independent policy making would give rise to "negative externalities." By providing information and reducing transaction costs among partners, institutions facilitate cooperation according to liberals. They have tended to focus on absolute gains to the states as a partof international institutions while the realists have pointed out that the problem of relative gains would prevent any significant cooperation. For realists, there are two major barriers to international cooperation: state concerns about cheating and state concerns about relative achievement of gains. Liberal institutionalists have tended to focus more on the former while the realists have drawn attention to the latter. Relative gains matter because a state would like to maintain its position in the international system according to defensive realists or would like to increase its share of globalpower as per offensive realists. In a world where states cannot be compelled to keep their promises and free riders can wreak havoc, the incentives for states to enter into reciprocal international arrangements are weak at best for the realists.

Fundamentally, for realists, international institutions cannot prevent states from behaving as short-term power maximizers as institutions reflect state calculations of self-interest based primarily on concerns about relative power.

Institutions do not have a significant effect on state behavior. Great powers use institutions to maintain or increase their power in the international system. Institutions reflect great power interests.States invest in institutions as they use institutions to further their interest. In the words of John Mearsheimer, "Can institutions get states to eschew short-term gains for long-terms benefits?" There is little evidence that they alter state behavior according to the realists.

The US-India nuclear deal is a significant case to test some of these claims. There isan emerging consensus that in the contemporary global security environment, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) presents the greatest challenge. This isespecially true of the dangers of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. This implies that strengthening nuclear nonproliferation should be the top priority of major powers. If even in the present international climate, the United States decides that its decision to build strategic partnership with India trumps the nonproliferation imperatives, then it goes a long way to show how insignificant international institutions are in global politics. A close examination of the debate that ensued in both the United States and India once the two states decided to forge a nuclear pact reveals therelative significance of various factors that determined the support for the deal in the United States and that continue to raise opposition in the Indian political discourse.

Great Power Politics versus Nonproliferation

Examining the debate in the United States and in India on the nuclear deal, one cannothelp but be struck by how insignificant the issue of nonproliferation was compared toother issues, especially the emerging "strategic partnership" between the United Statesand India. No doubt, the nonproliferation concerns were raised throughout the debate by the nonproliferation groups and some members of the US Congress, but when the time came to make a decision, the impact of the deal on either India's own nuclear weapons program or on the larger nuclear nonproliferation regime emerged as a minor factor.

When the US-India joint statement on civilian nuclear energy cooperation was signed in June 2005, the main focus of most reactions was in fact the impact that this deal would have on other states that might be thinking of pursuing nuclear weapons. It was argued that this was a signal to such states that acquiring nuclear weapons could be a stepping stone to recognition as a major global player without any sanctions beingimposed for such an acquisition. Initial reactions from the members of the US Congress were largely negative. They argued that the United States could not afford to play favorites and break the rules of the nonproliferation regime to favor one nation at therisk of undermining critical international treaties in nuclear weapons. The domestic US laws and India being a non-signatory to the NPT emerged as the main obstacles to garner support for the Bush Administration's decision to provide India with civilian nuclear reactors.

During the hearings in the US Congress, most experts also argued that the deal would weaken the nuclear nonproliferation regime in the long term. But what is significant is that during these hearings, other issues emerged as more salient, such as India's support for US policies toward Iran, India's role in the Proliferation Security Initiative, and democracy promotion. And the first criteria that Senator Lugar laid down for determining the US Congress' support for the nuclear pact was: How does civil nuclear cooperation strengthen the US-Indian strategic partnership, and why is itimportant? Meanwhile, the Bush Administration went ahead and told the US Congress that it could not determine whether India's 40-megawatt nuclear reactor called Cirus had violated a 1956 US-India contract which said that US heavy water could only be used for peaceful purpose. The Bush Administration argued that it is notpossible to have a conclusive answer on whether plutonium produced by the Cirus reactor was produced by the US heavy water. This was to assuage those who view India's 1974 nuclear test as violation of the 1956 US-India pact, stipulating that US heavy water could only be used for peaceful purposes.

India tested its first nuclear device in 1974, using plutonium that it had produced in a research reactor built by Canada with the assistance of the United States. That reactor, known as Cirus, had been built in the 1950s under the "Atom for Peace" program on the condition that it would be used only for civilian purposes. The test angered the US Congress, which responded by passing the Nonproliferation Act of 1978, which prohibited the sale of nuclear technology to any nonnuclear power that had notopened its facilities to international inspections. The nonproliferation groups in the United States have used the Cirus to question India's commitment to its nonproliferationcommitments, alleging that it diverted weapons-grade plutonium from this reactor to fuel Pokharan-I in 1974.

The agreement on the separation plan that was reached during President Bush's visit to India after intense negotiations also leaves India's strategic nuclear weapons program largely untouched. Sections of the US Congress were indeed concerned about the implications of the separation plan for India's nuclear stockpiles and US security as the deal might allow India to ramp up its weapons production as the supplyof nuclear fuel to India would free up India's existing capacity to produce plutonium and highly enriched uranium for its nuclear weapons stockpile. India has also not accepted safeguards on the prototype fast-breeder reactor and the fast-breeder test reactor, as well as on the reprocessing and enrichment capabilities associated with thefuel cycle for its strategic program. The idea that India will not focus on nuclear weapons in the future, as has been trumpeted by the Bush Administration officials, is unlikely considering the Indian Prime Minister's categorical assertion that, "India will not be constrained in any way in building future nuclear facilities,

whether civilian or military,as per [India's] national requirements," and, "No constraint has been placed on [India's] right to construct new facilities for strategic purposes." In fact, Indian strategists have openly suggested that, "Given India's uranium ore crunch and the need to build up our [India's] minimum credible nuclear deterrent arsenal as fast as possible, it is to India's advantage to categorize as many power reactors as possible ascivilian ones to be refueled by imported uranium and conserve our native uranium fuelfor weapon-grade plutonium production."

It was the Bush Administration's pitch that the deal was important in cementing its strategic partnership with India and for addressing US energy security that made its mark on the US Congress. The US-India pact was explicitly linked to the energy crunch the world is facing, and it was proposed that India's embrace of nuclear energywill reduce the pressure on fossil fuels. India's economic future is inextricably linked to its ability to produce power, and India is currently constructing eight new nuclear plants with more plants in the pipeline with the aim of enhancing its power capacity from the current 3,360 MWe to 7,280 MWe in the next five years. The administrationclaimed that helping India, whose economy is projected to be one of the five largest by 2020, develop civil nuclear energy will reduce demand for fossil fuels and lower petrolpump prices for US consumers. As of today, India imports three-fourths of its oil, natural gas, and coal and receives only 3 percent of its power from nuclear energy. While about one-third of India's new power supplies have come from natural gas and hydro-electricity over the last decade, the cost of natural gas and the environmental concerns over hydro-dams will force India toward an even greater use of coal in its energy mix. This can be devastating for global environment, and so India's embrace ofnuclear power is seen as a realistic answer to this problem.

There is also an argument to be made that the nuclear pact may prove advantageous to the US nuclear industry, which has been languishing for the past three decades. Opening up of the Indian market may spark the revival of an industry that hasn't seen a new plant being built in the last 30 years, though questions remain about the ability of leading US nuclear technology suppliers to meet Indian demands given their lack ofstate-of-the art technology.

US-India relations have been steadily strengthening in the last few years with theirinterests converging on a range of issues. But the nuclear technology denial regime with its larger restrictive implication across the entire technology spectrum has been afundamental irritant in this relationship. It was made clear to the US Congress that its failure to approve the deal would not only set back the clock on US-India relations butwould also revive the anti-US sections of the Indian elite. In her testimonies before theHouse and Senate Committees, Condoleezza Rice described India as "a rising global power that could be a pillar of stability in a rapidly changing Asia," and argued that the nuclear agreement was critical to forging a full-scale partnership between the world's two largest democracies.

Both houses of the US Congress overwhelmingly endorsed the Bush Administration's proposal to resume civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India, and the result wasthe Henry J. Hyde Act that the US President signed, carving out an exception to the Atomic Energy Act for India. He took issue, however, with language inserted by Congress into the law, especially Section 103, prohibiting the transfer of nuclear material to India in violation of the guidelines set by the NSG, and other riders like ensuring India's continued support for US policies toward Iran. President Bush released a signingstatement hours after the signing ceremony claiming that he reserves the right to ignore certain safeguards built into the legislation.

India's Red Line: Nuclear Weapons Program

While the Bush Administration was successful in sidelining the issue of nonproliferation in the political discourse as the debate evolved in the United States, the whole debate in India was and continues to be about the impact that this deal will have on India's nuclear weapons program. The Indian Right argued that the Indian government had surrendered its right to determine what kind of nuclear deterrent it should have in the future based on its own threat perception. For the Indian Left, the deal was symptomaticof a larger problem with Indian foreign policy of playing second fiddle to the United States and surrendering its own interests, as America's recognition of India as a"responsible state with advanced nuclear technology" that should "acquire the same benefits as other such states" falls short of full admission to the nuclear club. India's strategic weapons program remains a very sensitive issue for the Indian scientific andstrategic community, and the Indian Prime Minister had to assure the Indian Parliament that "India will place under safeguards only those facilities that can be identified as civilian without damaging the nation's deterrence potential." He seemed to have succeeded in doing that.

The Hyde Act itself has come under criticism from several sections of the Indian strategic elite despite the US President emphasizing that many of the more problematicprovisions of the bill from the Indian viewpoint will not be operative. For the Indian critics, however, some of the provisions of the Hyde Act cannot be reconciled with theassurances that the Indian Prime Minister had given to the Indian Parliament, and theUS law is viewed as an attempt to take away India's right to maintain its nuclear deterrent without offering full civilian cooperation. The head of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission expressed his concerns about the act impinging on the India Research and Development program in the nuclear power sector and asserted that clarifications would be sought from the United States.

The Indian Prime Minister had to reassure the critics that remaining differences would be ironed out in the negotiations

of the bilateral agreement with Washington. The Indian government has also expressed its disapproval of certain "extra venous andproscriptive" provisions of the Hyde Act but has sought to allay concerns over them by relying on the powers of interpretation of the US Executive. When confronted by the opposition, the Indian government had to specifically assert that the 123 agreementwould not mention India's voluntary moratorium on testing; moratorium on fissile material production would not be a condition for the deal; the issue of reprocessing will be dealt with seriously; and that the US government has assured that fuel supply will not be affected under the present laws. The Indian government argued that protecting the autonomy of India's strategic program, maintaining the integrity of the three-stage nuclear power program, and safeguarding indigenous research and development, including the fast-breeder program would be the main focus while negotiating the bilateral 123 agreement with the United States. It was clear that if the final 123 agreement did not satisfy most of these requirements, the Indian governmentwould find the going very tough in securing domestic support for the deal.

While the Bush Administration needed a 123 agreement that was consistent with the Hyde Act, the Indian government wanted to ensure that the terms of the agreement did not constrain India's long-term options on national security, thereby making some of the differences very hard to reconcile. New Delhi's freedom to reprocess the spent fuel and the consequences of a potential nuclear test emerged as the two most contentious issues. After five rounds of intense, often contentious negotiations, India and the United States finally agreed on the terms of the 123 agreement that was necessary for India to be able to engage the international community, including the United States, in civilian nuclear commerce. The United States committed itself to uninterrupted fuel supplies and will help India in developing a strategic fuel reserve. India is allowed to reprocess spent fuel from its civilian reactors in a new facility, which will be subject to IAEA safeguards. While there does not seem to be any explicitreference to India's nuclear tests in the future, the US President remains bound by theAtomic Energy Act to ask for the return of nuclear fuel and technology if such an eventuality arises. However, there is an explicit provision in the agreement stating thatthe United States will not hinder the growth of India's nuclear weapons program through this agreement. It would not be inaccurate to say that the United States seems to have made far greater concessions than India. Critics in the United States have called it everything from "a complete capitulation on US laws" to "a deal that makes it easier for India to resume nuclear testing." In India, even as the BJP was initially forced to concede that the Indian negotiators have done a "superb job" in clinching thepath-breaking pact, the deal resulted in tensions between the Congress Party and itsmain coalition partners, the Left parties, pushing the coalition to the brink of collapse.

While it can be argued that by bringing a significant part of India's nuclear weapons program under the auspices of the IAEA, the US-India pact strengthens the nuclear nonproliferation regime, proliferation concerns played a largely marginal role in the debate on this pact in the United States. It might be tempting to view it as another example of the Bush Administration's dislike for international institutions. Yet even the Democrats, despite all their rhetoric about the sanctity of global institutions, endedup backing this pact with an astounding majority. This is one of the rare bipartisan success stories of President Bush's tenure. On the other hand, India continues to debate the impact of this pact on its nuclear weapons program, and even a slightest hint that this pact in any way closes India's options vis-à-vis its nuclear arsenal in the future would sound the death knell for the entire negotiating process. India made it clear that if the eventual cooperative framework is seen as compromising Indian national interest, India would "walk out, no matter how much political capital has been invested."

Critics in India have continued to argue that the pact will limit India's option to test nuclear weapons if the need arose in the future. Under the deal, the United Stateswould terminate the agreement and could even demand the return of reactors and fuelsupplied by it. But while negotiating the agreement, the Indian side pushed the American side to soften the whole breakaway clause by ensuring no sudden deaths or withdrawal. There would be a protracted negotiation, and the circumstances that led India to test would become a major factor. This would mean that if Pakistan or China tested, India would have good enough reasons to test. The US President would then have waiver power to prevent the provisions of the Act from being enforced. What will determine the response of future US Presidents will have less to do with specific wording of the agreement and more with the future state of Indo-US relations. Meanwhile, there is little likelihood of the deal having any negative impact on India's nuclear weapons program. Under the deal, India has so far identified eight reactors that would be designated as military, and it has two research reactors. Thesewould provide as much fissile material as India needs for its credible minimum deterrent. Since India would be allowed to import fuel, it can conserve its domestic reserves to build weapons. Despite its stated willingness to support global negotiations on FMCT, India is unlikely to sign it until it is satisfied it has a large enough stockpile.

The larger point here is not whether India will expand its nuclear arsenal or not as a result of this pact. In fact, it has rightly been suggested that India already has the indigenous reserves of natural uranium necessary to undergird the largest possible nucleararsenal it may desire, and, consequently, the US-Indian civilian nuclear cooperation initiative will not materially contribute toward New Delhi's strategic capacities in anyconsequential way either directly or by freeing up its internal resources. India's domestic political and economic constraints and its strategic culture will probably be more significant factors in determining the trajectory of Indian nuclear weapons. The point is simply that even at a time when the nuclear nonproliferation regime seems onthe verge of collapsing and when the spread of WMD is seen as the greatest threat to

international security, the institutional imperatives of the nuclear nonproliferation regime are largely redundant in shaping US foreign policy. Even in those countries that have been largely supportive of the deal, the perception is strong that the deal is part of the broader effort to reshape the Asian balance of power and growing concerns about the willingness of the United States to use the NPT as a pawn in its larger geo-strategic maneuvering.

It is the strategic interests of the United States that have been the drivers behind theUS-Indian nuclear pact, revealing once again how international institutions are epiphenomenal in global politics and are merely reflections of larger forces at work inthe international system. In this case, the American interest in a strategic partnership with India made sure that the institutional imperatives of the nuclear nonproliferation regime got sidelined. Great power politics, as always, continues to trump internationalinstitutions. For the realists, this won't come as a big surprise. But for those who continue to place their hopes on the "false promise" of global institutions to alter state behavior, this should serve as a wake-up call.

Conclusion

History might agree with Senator Richard Lugar's assessment that the nuclear agreement with India is the most important strategic diplomatic initiative undertaken by President George W. Bush. During his trip to India, President Bush claimed that the United States and India are "closer than ever before, and this partnership has the power to transform the world." It is this vision that became the hallmark of the Bush Administration's policy toward India from the very beginning and led it to proclaim openly that it would help India emerge as a major global player in the twenty-first century. India was viewed not only as a potential counterweight to China and militantIslam but also as a responsible rising power that needs to be accommodated into the global order. The nuclear pact, therefore, is not an end in itself for either India or the United States. It is about the need to evolve a strong strategic partnership between theworld's two major democracies as they both try to adjust to the emerging balance of power.

The significance of the deal cannot be overestimated. In addition to reversing decades of US policy opposing nuclear cooperation with India – a nuclear weapons state that continues to refuse to sign the NPT – the deal wins acceptance for India's defacto nuclear weapons state status at the NSG, the international cartel that controls trade in nuclear technology and fuel and that was established as a response to India's defiance of the global nuclear order in 1974. This recognition now allows India to takepart in international nuclear commerce, and for India, this is a ringing endorsement ofits growing weight in global affairs and an acknowledgment of its growing intimacy with the world's only remaining superpower.

This article makes clear that because of the unprecedented nature of the nuclear pact, it could only come about due to a convergence of a range of factors at the structural, domestic political, and individual levels. And yet as the article underlines, the negotiating process was a complex and laborious one for both India and the United States. In his study of America, Alexis de Tocqueville has observed: "Foreign politics . . . require the perfect use of almost all those qualities in which it is deficient . . . Democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles. It cannotcombine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience." It is notsurprising, therefore, that India and the United States, both major democracies, took more than three years to successfully conclude the agreement despite an appreciationat the highest levels of the long-term significance of the pact.

Finally, this article examines the US-India nuclear pact through the prism of the broader debate in international relations literature on the role of international institutions in global politics and argues that suggestions to the contrary notwithstanding, the pactis primarily a response to great power realignment in a contemporary international system. Nonproliferation concerns have been largely peripheral to the whole process of negotiating this pact, underlining once more that great power politics will continueto trump institutional imperatives.

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