

Civil Nuclear Deals between India and United States



Political Science

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

Even though United States in 1950s helped India to develop nuclear energy under the Atoms for Peace program, it was criticized the Pokhran tests in 1998. Later, civil nuclear agreement was made by the United States with India. The paper highlighted the characteristics and advantages of Civil Nuclear deal to India.

Introduction:

In the 1950s, the United States helped India develop nuclear energy under the Atoms for Peace program. The United States built a nuclear reactor for India, provided nuclear fuel for a time, and allowed Indian scientists study at U.S. nuclear laboratories. In 1968, India refused to sign the NPT, claiming it was biased. In 1974, India tested its first nuclear bomb, showing it could develop nuclear weapons with technology transferred for peaceful purposes. As a result, the United States isolated India for twenty-five years, refusing nuclear cooperation and trying to convince other countries to do the same¹.

After the nuclear tests in 1998 at Pokhran in India, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was dispatched to hold talks with India and Pakistan. The agreements were included the issues such as Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), freeze the production of fissile materials, adopting non-threatening nuclear weapons, etc. In 2000, Presidents Bill Clinton's visit to India, the first visit of a U.S. President since Jimmy Carter, was widely characterized as a success. Interestingly, for the first time, not less than 150 Indian Americans accompanied the U.S. delegation to India.

The UPA government has followed on the footsteps of the BJP-led government in accepting the US rhetoric on democracy. All the India-US joint statements accord primacy to "democracy" and "freedom." This implicitly conveys the message that India is politically and ideologically with the US in its crusade to project democracy and freedom as weapons to enforce regime change, prise open economies and establish US hegemony in countries and regions. As a result, nuclear cooperation agreements were made between the India and the United States.

Nuclear Cooperation:

Nuclear cooperation between the two countries was established in two steps. During the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Washington on July 18, 2005, both states agreed on the principles of close Indo-US cooperation in the nuclear field.

In March 2006 during the President Bush visited India, the separation plan outlined that 14 out of 22 facilities would be designated as civilian, and thus accessible to international inspectors. Eight military facilities would be off-limits for inspectors. Crucially, India was allowed to keep two fast-breeder reactors within its military program. This is important because the fast breeder reactors, when they become operational, can produce large quantities of weapons-grade plutonium².

The fact that nuclear technology was chosen as the symbolic cornerstone of the partnership was based less on economic than on political considerations. The USA and India belong to the few states that give nuclear technology the most attention and define their international positions by the possession of nuclear weapons to a greater extent than do other countries. In this context, to place this technology on the symbolic top of the bilateral partnership appears to be quite consequential.

Highlights of the Nuclear Agreement:

Within the agreement, 14 of India's nuclear installations are la-

belled civilian and are made accessible to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections, according to its safeguards provisions. Eight further installations are declared military, and are therefore excluded from inspections and from nuclear technology transfer³. For its civilian nuclear infrastructure, India receives access to nuclear know-how, and, more importantly, nuclear fuel from the USA and other country members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), pending cartel approval for relaxing nonproliferation provisions.

The division of India's nuclear infrastructure into a civilian and a military programme remained the most difficult issue during the negotiation process. The debate focused on the classification of the so-called fast breeder reactors for reprocessing burned fuel rods, in which fissionable plutonium is produced as a by-product. Although the fast breeder technology is not yet sufficiently developed for the commercial production of energy, India emphasized its potential civilian application in the future. Still, it refused to actually declare it civilian and place it under the IAEA safeguard regime. While in the first agreement of July 2005 it appeared as if the United States had asserted its demand for inspections of the Indian fast breeder reactors, the final cooperation agreement signed in March 2006 adopted the Indian position by excluding them from the safeguard inspections regime.

The Relevance of Nuclear Deal for India:

Today, the USA is India's most important trading partner. In a memorandum attached to the agreement, both countries declared the goal of increasing the already considerable bilateral volume of trade from 22 bn \$ (2005) to more than 50 bn \$ in 2008.1 Next to a wide range of commodities, the bilateral trade agenda is planned to include nuclear power plants and fuel rods. In 2006, nuclear power's share of India's overall energy production was less than 3%. According to the projections of the Indian government, this share will increase to about 25% by the year 2050. The agreement reached in 2006 is thereby considered to be the most crucial element in the government's strategy to reach this ambitious target. While these projected figures appear overly optimistic to many observers, the transfer of badly needed knowhow in reactor design and the import of nuclear fuel undoubtedly have the potential to improve the relatively low cost-benefit performance of India's nuclear energy industry to an acceptable level. Correspondingly, India's nuclear scientists and engineers mostly welcomed the agreement: in former Atomic Energy Agency Chairman, M. R. Srinivasan's words: "It re-establishes India's capabilities in the international stage while removing the decades of isolation in which atomic energy in India was developed"⁴.

In India, criticism of the agreement was modest at best, which is remarkable considering the traditional scepticism among India's elite with regard to any agreement which would ostensibly curtail the country's sovereignty. The vehement criticism raised by the oppositional BJP party was widely considered to be guided by partisan considerations. As one analyst remarked, "what is astonishing, however, is the intense criticism emerging from India, particularly from leaders of the BJP who when they were in power had made proposals embodying identical principles to those underlying the current agreement"⁵.

Overall, regardless of whether the civilian use of nuclear energy will ever play the crucial role for India's economic development that the government hopes it will, the agreement remains of vast importance for the Indian government beyond its economic implications. According to a view widely shared in India, it symbolizes the ultimate recognition of India as a major nuclear power. American policy makers were well aware of the fact that India's desire for this status could be presented as the single most dominant foreign policy issue in this country, and skilfully adjusted their rhetoric in declaring that the USA was keen "to help India become a major world power in the twenty-first century"⁶. This rhetoric turned out to be most compelling, and was crucial in removing any criticism and objections the agreement would have otherwise faced in India.

Conclusion:

For India, nuclear cooperation bears many advantages and few

disadvantages; for the USA, on the other hand, the deal bears many more risks. Next to the economic advantages related to the transfer of badly needed know-how and nuclear components, the agreement is viewed by India first of all as valuable in terms of increasing its international status, and its goal of finally becoming recognized as a major power. India's opinion leaders displayed great satisfaction from their perception that the agreement has finally awarded India with the status of an important international actor, which it deserves. Critics of the agreement point to the loss of sovereignty which India faces due to its accession to the IAEA safeguard inspections regime. In view of the long list of restrictions and limitations of the inspections, such criticism appears to be more symbol than substance.

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