

Indo US Nuclear Deal: Why this hurry and at what cost?



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Amidst protests against price rises of essential items throughout the country, the PM Manmohan Singh has again started harping on the issue of the Indo-US Nuclear Deal. The Deal has been pushed forward in India in an anti-democratic manner without approval of the Parliament - in fact in the teeth of opposition by a large majority of parliamentarians. The Deal has the potential of disturbing regional stability and further distorting India 's relationships with important neighbours like China , Pakistan and Iran.

This cannot also but severely undermine the prospects for both vertical and horizontal non-proliferation and thereby the prospects for global nuclear disarmament. This allurements also has the danger of further propelling India towards becoming a junior military ally of the US and a market to mint profits for its MNCs and also the nuclear industry of other advanced countries -- Russia and France, in particular.

Most importantly it will be a set back to the environmentally friendly sustainable ways of meeting our energy requirements. Power from nuclear energy is a failed project in developed countries and the eagerness of the Prime Minister to clinch the Deal fails to generate any enthusiasm among the common people of India. Neither is nuclear energy a solution to global warming as some experts make it out to be.

On the contrary the entire nuclear fuel cycle is fraught with danger and exposes human beings to hazardous radiation. The world is yet to find a safe way for disposal of radioactive waste, a factor which is constraining the growth of nuclear power programmes in the developed countries.

The US, UK, Canada, Germany, France, Japan all seem to be reviewing their nuclear energy programmes and commissioning of new nuclear power plants in all these countries has almost come to a stand still.

Australia , the biggest supplier of Uranium in the world, is yet to initiate a nuclear power programme. Everybody has realized there is no future in nuclear energy. Advanced countries are looking for alternatives. But because of the parochial vision of our government the ruling class of this country has become obsessed with the nuclear option without any clear understanding of its implications. There seems to be a superficial feeling that this Deal is somehow going to enhance the stature of India in the community of nations. Hence it is matter of vanity and false sense of pride with possibly no concrete benefits for the people of this country.

A Planning Commission study shows that even with the best possible estimates of capacity addition in power generation after the Deal is through, the country is not going to increase its share of electricity from nuclear energy from the present 3% to more than 7-9%. And this would come at a huge cost -- financially and politically. We would be required to bring our foreign policy in line with the US policy as has been already exhibited by India being forced to vote against Iran in the IAEA meeting.

The Indo-US Nuclear Deal is meant to serve the interests of the global nuclear power industry and is a ploy to keep India away from staking claims to shrinking fossil fuel reserves in proportion to its large population so that these reserves may last for some more time for the rich countries.

The undue importance given to the Indo-US Nuclear Deal as opposed to the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, even though gas is predicted to be the major source of power globally for the next two to three decades, raises questions about the motives of the Indian government.

The most diabolical aspect of the Deal is the increasing military proximity between the US and India . Joint Indo-US military exercises have already been going on for the last seven years with the aim of building interoperability.

A Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School has been established at Vairengte in Mizoram. The US Congress has been briefed that in a war that is being predicted with China in about fifteen years from now, the US would like to see India on its side. US envisions a military base for itself on India soil soon.

The increasing militarization of the India State is also being used to stifle civil liberties and democratic movements in the country. India must learn a lesson from the history of US military involvement in various parts of the world which have been left devastated. It is dangerous to have the US as an enemy but fatal to have as a friend.

The friendship and the elusive geo-political status or possibly a seat in the Security Council, whatever the Government of India is aspiring for, is going to come at the cost of loss of sovereignty to the nation. Our status will be reduced to that of a second rate UK or Israel .

In the face of unprecedented pressure mounted by the US , the Left Front, a partner in the UPA alliance, must be congratulated for successfully stalling the Indo-US Nuclear Deal up till now. The Deal is now stuck at the stage of finalizing a India specific agreement with the IAEA. The Left party leaders have displayed foresight in foiling the US

hegemonic designs in South Asia even though they have yet to take an ideological position against the nuclear power programme.

Manmohan Singh, who talked about renewable energy for the last time at NAM meeting two years ago, has directed the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy to draft an umbrella legislation for promotion and growth of renewable energy, under duress. It would make more political, economic and environmental sense for India to pursue a path of self reliant renewable energy programme for fulfilling its need rather than the elusive nuclear energy for which we'll always be at the mercy of external agencies. But then India will have to give up its own hegemonic designs of acting as a regional military super power.

Clean source of energy will have to be accompanied by clean politics. India will have to work on the agenda of regional peace, disarmament and stability rather than converting it into a region of warfare. If Manmohan Singh embarks on this twin objective programme, he would be remembered for his wisdom more than he would be if he were to finalize the Indo-US Nuclear Deal. He would favourably alter the course of history of not only this nation but also possibly the world towards a cleaner, safer and secure future.

- Dr Sandeep Pandey

(The author is a Ramon Magsaysay Awardee (2002) for emergent leadership, heads the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and did his PhD from University of California, Berkeley in control theory which is applicable in missile technology. He can be contacted at: ashaashram@yahoo.com)

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