

Nuclear Weapons, Criminal States, and the US-India Deal

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Nuclear-armed states are criminal states. They have a legal obligation, confirmed by the World Court, to live up to Article 6 of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which calls on them to carry out good-faith negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons entirely. None of the nuclear states has lived up to it.

The United States is a leading violator, especially the Bush administration, which even has stated that it isn't subject to Article 6.

On July 27, Washington entered into an agreement with India that guts the central part of the NPT, though there remains substantial opposition in both countries. India, like Israel and Pakistan (but unlike Iran), is not an NPT signatory, and has developed nuclear weapons outside the treaty. With this new agreement, the Bush administration effectively endorses and facilitates this outlaw behaviour. The agreement violates US law, and bypasses the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the 45 nations that have established strict rules to lessen the danger of proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association,

observes that the agreement doesn't bar further Indian nuclear testing and, "incredibly, ... commits Washington to help New Delhi secure fuel supplies from other countries even if India resumes testing." It also permits India to "free up its limited domestic supplies for bomb production." All these steps are in direct violation of international nonproliferation agreements.

The Indo-US agreement is likely to prompt others to break the rules as well. Pakistan is reported to be building a plutonium production reactor for nuclear weapons, apparently beginning a more advanced phase of weapons design. Israel, the regional nuclear superpower, has been lobbying Congress for privileges similar to India's, and has approached the Nuclear Suppliers Group with requests for exemption from its rules. Now France, Russia and Australia have moved to pursue nuclear deals with India, as China has with Pakistan - hardly a surprise, once the global superpower has opened the door.

The Indo-US deal mixes military and commercial motives. Nuclear weapons specialist Gary Milhollin noted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's testimony to Congress that the agreement was "crafted with the private sector firmly in mind," particularly aircraft and reactors and, Milhollin stresses, military aircraft. By undermining the barriers against nuclear war, he

adds, the agreement
 not only increases regional tensions but also "may
 hasten the day
 when a nuclear explosion destroys an American
 city." Washington's
 message is that "export controls are less important
 to the United
 States than money" - that is, profits for US
 corporations - whatever
 the potential threat. Kimball points out that the
 United States is
 granting India "terms of nuclear trade more
 favourable than those for
 states that have assumed all the obligations and
 responsibilities" of
 the NPT. In most of the world, few can fail to see
 the cynicism.
 Washington rewards allies and clients that ignore
 the NPT rules
 entirely, while threatening war against Iran, which
 is not known to
 have violated the NPT, despite extreme
 provocation: The United States
 has occupied two of Iran's neighbours and openly
 sought to overthrow
 the Iranian regime since it broke free of US control
 in 1979.

Over the past few years, India and Pakistan have
 made strides towards
 easing the tensions between the two countries.
 People-to-people
 contacts have increased and the governments are
 in discussion over
 the many outstanding issues that divide the two
 states. Those
 promising developments may well be reversed by
 the Indo-US nuclear
 deal. One of the means to build confidence
 throughout the region was
 the creation of a natural gas pipeline from Iran
 through Pakistan
 into India. The "peace pipeline" would have tied
 the region together
 and opened the possibilities for further peaceful
 integration.

The pipeline, and the hope it offers, might become
 a casualty of the
 Indo-US agreement, which Washington sees as a
 measure to isolate its

Iranian enemy by offering India nuclear power in
 exchange for Iranian
 gas - though in fact India would gain only a fraction
 of what Iran
 could provide.

The Indo-US deal continues the pattern of
 Washington's taking every
 measure to isolate Iran. In 2006, the US Congress
 passed the Hyde
 Act, which specifically demanded that the US
 government "secure
 India's full and active participation in United States
 efforts to
 dissuade, isolate, and if necessary, sanction and
 contain Iran for
 its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction."

It is noteworthy that the great majority of
 Americans - and Iranians
 - favour converting the entire region to a nuclear-
 weapons free zone,
 including Iran and Israel. One may also recall that
 UN Security
 Council Resolution 687 of April 3, 1991, to which
 Washington
 regularly appealed when seeking justification for
 its invasion of
 Iraq, calls for "establishing in the Middle East a
 zone free from
 weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for
 their delivery."

Clearly, ways to mitigate current crises aren't
 lacking.

This Indo-US agreement richly deserves to be
 derailed. The threat of
 nuclear war is extremely serious, and growing, and
 part of the reason
 is that the nuclear states - led by the United States
 - simply refuse
 to live up to their obligations or are significantly
 violating them,
 this latest effort being another step toward
 disaster.

The US Congress gets a chance to weigh in on this
 deal after the
 International Atomic Energy Agency and the
 Nuclear Suppliers Group

vet it. Perhaps Congress, reflecting a citizenry fed up with nuclear gamesmanship, can reject the agreement. A better way to go forward is to pursue the need for global nuclear disarmament, recognising that the very survival of the species is at stake.

Noam Chomsky's most recent book is

Interventions, a collection of his commentary pieces. Chomsky is emeritus professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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