

How Bush sealed a nuclear deal with India

BY MATTHEW COOPER

It came down to the final minutes. Ever since last July, when George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed to an historic nuclear deal, negotiators have been working to finalize the arrangement. The big idea was that India, which has been a pariah in the world community ever since it announced its oxymoronic "peaceful nuclear explosion" in 1974, would agree to put its civilian nuclear power facilities under international inspection in exchange for being able to buy nuclear technology from the United States. The administration argued that the deal would bring India into some kind of international compliance, even if it had failed to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Critics said that India was being rewarded for bad behavior and that other nations would be encouraged to cut their own bilateral deals to get nuclear power.

Over the next eight months, American and Indian negotiators worked endlessly to give the Bush-Singh plan specifics. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, a career diplomat who has held senior spots in both the Clinton and Bush administrations, did much of the heavy lifting, traveling to India five times. But working out the agreement proved difficult. Of India's 22 nuclear reactors, for instance, India originally only wanted to have 4 designated as civilian and covered by international inspection, according to a senior U.S. official. Eventually that number got up to 14. The rest are designated as military and not subject to any kind of inspection. Last week, Burns cut off negotiations and went back to the United States over the issue of whether all future Indian civilian reactors would be put under international safeguards. The issue was critical. Right now India gets only about 3% of its power from nuclear plants and the country has huge and growing energy needs.

It aims to have 25% of its power come from nukes by 2050 and plans an extraordinary expansion of nuclear power. If those new plants weren't under international scrutiny, the deal would fall apart.

Late Wednesday night, after Bush's delegation arrived in New Delhi, Burns and National Security Adviser Steven Hadley met at the offices of Prime Minister Singh and continued their talks with Indian officials. Burns and Hadley took off at midnight to

less than two hours before Bush and Singh had scheduled a joint news conference and the world was expecting to know whether the deal would go through. In the end, the Indians did agree to put all future civilian reactors under international inspection and to make their safeguards permanent rather than temporary, said the senior administration official. For its part, the United States agreed to lobby hard for India to get nu-

hibits sales of nuclear supplies to countries that do not agree to international standards. Singh must do a comparable sales job in India, where the nuclear program is a source of great national pride and any international inspection is regarded with wariness.

That said, the smart betting is that the deal goes through even though Congress will be skeptical of such a radical departure of international norms and there will be debate. After all, the U.S. is essentially chucking a decades-long position that tells nations that if you break from proliferation agreements or test nukes—as India did again in 1998—you get isolated. "Our Congress has got to understand that it's in our economic interests that India have a civilian nuclear power industry to help take the pressure off the global demand for energy.... And so I'm trying to think differently, not to stay stuck in the past," says Bush.

India needs the nuclear power desperately. It's on track to become the world's most populous nation and in need of power to fuel its surging economy. What's more, the country's own coal is particularly dirty and polluting and no one concerned about global warming wants to see India stay as reliant on fossil fuels. The U.S. is eager to cement its ties with India as well as reap the economic benefits of selling billions of dollars in nuclear equipment to India at a time when America's nuclear power industry hasn't built a new plant in over 30 years. More importantly, U.S. India relations are, in Burns's words, at a "high water mark" since 1947. The nuclear deal and a slew of economic agreements and greater military and intelligence cooperation have pushed the two countries together as they both fear Islamic-based terror groups. The nuclear deal was the biggest obstacle preventing normal relations between the two countries. Now, it's on its way to being removed.



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get some sleep while lower-level officials continued throughout the night. Hadley and Burns picked up again at 7 a.m. at Hyderabad House, a stately government building, where Bush and Singh were meeting. After Bush and Singh themselves pushed the negotiators to get the deal done, the final agreement was hammered out at 10:30 a.m.,

clear fuel from the 35-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group, which has forbidden sales to India.

American officials will now work hard to sell the deal on Capitol Hill, where there's been some skepticism from those who think it undermines nonproliferation treaties. Congress would have to amend two laws including a 52-year-old statute that pro-

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