

Nuclear partnership with

BY SELIG S. HARRISON

One of the few bright spots on a murky US global horizon is India. After decades of tensions with New Delhi, the Bush administration is moving steadily to establish a new strategic partnership to strengthen India as a counterweight to China in the Asian balance of power.

The cornerstone of the administration's India initiative is an agreement concluded July 18 by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh providing for civilian nuclear cooperation. Negotiations on the implementation of this agreement are the focus of the president's visit to India.

India urgently needs a massive expansion of its civilian nuclear power program to cope with an escalating energy shortage that threatens its economic and political stability.

But congressional critics, who have never forgiven India for refusing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, attack the accord as a reward for bad behavior.

The July agreement cannot be implemented without proposed changes in 1978 US law that are

clearly justified.

The treaty does not bar the United States and other signatory nations from providing civilian nuclear technology under safeguards to nonsignatories such as India.

But Congress went far beyond the treaty by barring nonsignatories from any civilian nuclear cooperation with the United States. This has had ridiculous consequences.

Washington can sell civilian nuclear reactors to China, which signed the treaty but has violated Article One by giving nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan and Iran.

At the same time, the United States has barred such sales to India, which did not sign the treaty but has never transferred nuclear technology to others.

The exclusion of India from civilian nuclear cooperation is a relic of earlier decades when the United States was trying to stop New Delhi from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Now that it has joined the nuclear club, the 1978 law should be modified.

The agreement would require India to place all reactors under international safeguards if they get financing, fuel, or compo-

ponents from the United States or members of the US-led Nuclear Suppliers Group. Prime Minister Singh has faithfully fulfilled his commitment in the accord that India would "identify and separate civilian and nuclear facilities in a phased manner."

After bitter internal battles with nuclear nationalists in India, he has presented Washington with a credible timetable designating which of India's nuclear facilities are restricted to nuclear power generation, which ones will be shifted over to civilian purposes at specified stages, and which ones will be left for military use.

Sixty-five percent of India's nuclear power capacity is on the civilian list, much more than the nuclear hawks in New Delhi wanted.

The administration has been pressing for a longer civilian list, hoping to appease its critics, who would like to put a cap on India's nuclear weapons potential.

But the agreement gives New Delhi the right to decide on the civilian-military mix, and whether a compromise can be negotiated is uncertain.

Critics point out that the agree-

ment gives India the freedom to build new military reactors and exempts key research and development facilities with a military potential from safeguards.

They object to the very concept of a civilian-military separation plan that implicitly acknowledges the military component of the Indian nuclear program.

But this acknowledgement was long overdue. Asia is clearly more stable now that India has its "credible minimum deterrent" than it would be with China enjoying a nuclear monopoly.

In any case, the United States, with its 7,000 operational nuclear weapons, is in no position to criticize India for a deterrent force now believed to consist of 150 to 200 warheads.

Critics also argue that the accord invites other countries to demand equal treatment. Treaty signatories like Brazil and Argentina that are in compliance with Article One, like India, should indeed be given comparable access to civilian nuclear technology.

Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan, with questionable compliance records, should not.

In a recent conversation in New

India

Delhi, Prime Minister Singh emphasized his belief that India's future prosperity depends on pursuing a close economic and technological partnership with the United States.

Such a partnership is a natural. The United States and India have no geopolitical conflicts of interest and share democratic values, market economics, and widespread linguistic compatibility in English.

With India's growth rate now soaring past 7 percent, the United States clearly stands to benefit from expanding trade and investment opportunities in everything from computer technology to military aircraft, not to mention the potential benefit from cooperation in fighting Islamic terrorism and maritime cooperation with the Indian navy from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca.

The July accord serves both nonproliferation objectives and wider US geopolitical interests and deserves unqualified congressional support.

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