

India submits to the Bush doctrine?

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The Manmohan Singh government's 'bold' new line on nuclear non-proliferation is full of sound and fury but signifies nothing other than the loss of our official capacity to analyse the world rationally and independently.

DESPITE THE fiasco over the non-discovery of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, one of the enduring foreign policy successes of the Bush administration has been the diversion of international concern about nuclear weapons away from America's own stockpile, doctrine, and force posture and towards the problem of 'rogue' proliferation. Within this discourse, North Korea, which says it has nuclear weapons, and Iran, which Washington insists is actively pursuing a weapons programme, pose a grave and imminent threat to international security, while the U.S. efforts to militarise space and enhance the flexibility and usability of its nuclear arsenal through the development of new kinds of 'small' weapons such as bunker busters pose no danger to the world at all.

Central to this approach is the notion that the new nuclear "threats" must be dealt with not through rule-based, multilateral institutions such as the Conference on Disarmament but through ad hoc, U.S.-led coalitions that arrogate to themselves the right both to draw up new rules and regulations and to enforce them with military means if necessary. Largely due to the resistance of China and South Korea, Washington was forced to drop its reliance on the threat of force against North Korea and work towards a negotiated settlement of the Korean nuclear question. But Iran still remains firmly in the Bush administration's sights.

Until now, the self-serving reduction of the problem of proliferation to one of the "horizontal" spread of weapons alone (rather than of "vertical" or qualitative enhancement as well) has tended to be accepted only by Washington's closest allies and friends. But with the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership entering a decisive new phase, the Indian foreign office has become the latest convert to this cause. Earlier this week, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran [delivered a major lecture](#) entitled 'Nuclear Non-Proliferation and International Security,' which attempts to lay out the new Indian perspective on the subject.

The lecture intended to answer the domestic critics of the Government's vote against Iran at the September 24 International Atomic Energy Agency meeting by embedding that inexplicable decision in a supposedly wider policy framework. Mr. Saran also sought to reassure U.S. legislators that India was a 'genuine' believer in the Bush doctrine on non-proliferation and could be relied upon to continue extending its "support" to other "national and trans-national efforts" like the controversial Proliferation Security Initiative provided the July 18 Indo-U.S. nuclear deal comes through.

Mr. Saran says a "new global consensus on non-proliferation is called for," which can take

into account “new challenges.” This new global consensus “would have to be based on new and more rigorous standards being observed in export controls on sensitive technologies” such as those involved in reprocessing and enrichment. While one can understand the Government’s eagerness to reassure the U.S. that it is deadly serious about export control, why should this be the only area where a new “global consensus” is required? Surely a global consensus on the prevention of an arms race in outer space is equally important. As is a consensus on, say, a first-use only doctrine rather than the frighteningly flexible use doctrine the U.S. military subscribes to.

Had Mr. Saran sought to analyse the problem of non-proliferation and international security from the perspective of international strategic realities, he would have pointed out that Washington’s missile defence programme will lead to a new and more deadly missile race. Countries targeted by U.S. nuclear weapons would seek to nullify the advantage missile defence will confer on their principal adversary. He would also have pointed out how the doctrines of pre-emptive war and ‘regime change’ have vitiated the security environment to such an extent that many countries are once again looking at nuclear weapons as a means of state survival. Even if horizontal proliferation were its sole concern, a state that is serious about, say, the danger of Iran going nuclear would counsel both Teheran to respect its international obligations and the U.S. to abandon the path of confrontation, sanctions, and regime change.

An afterthought

Of course, India knows the charges against Iran are trumped up — it admitted as much in its [convoluted “explanation of vote”](#) at the IAEA last month — and only went along with the anti-Teheran resolution because of pressure from the U.S. As an afterthought now, Mr. Saran has introduced a new element to justify that vote — the need to put A.Q. Khan in the dock. “With respect to the Iran nuclear issue ... we see no reason why there should be an insistence on personal interviews with Iranian scientists but an exception granted to a man who has been accused of running a global ‘nuclear Wal-Mart’.” Had India raised this point during the IAEA debate on Iran, it might have carried more conviction. Today, it is an idle fantasy to believe that the Bush administration is seriously interested in getting at Dr. Khan or that the anti-Iran vote will lead to a chain of events in which the Pakistani nuclear establishment — and military — will stand exposed.

Towards the end of his speech, Mr. Saran makes an observation on the proposed separation of military and civilian nuclear facilities that suggests it is not just our national capacity for rational analysis that is being compromised. “It makes no sense,” the Foreign Secretary declared, “for India to deliberately keep some of its civilian facilities out of its declaration for safeguards purposes.” If Mr. Saran’s words are followed through, all civilian nuclear facilities — including the prototype fast breeder reactor (PFBR) and other R&D facilities — will be offered for IAEA safeguards. This is something Anil Kakodkar, chairman of the Department of Atomic Energy, [had ruled out in an interview](#) to The Hindu and Frontline in August. Mr. Saran’s statement would also appear to contradict the suggestion [made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Parliament on July 29](#) that the identification and separation of military and civilian facilities would be a “phased action” that will be “based solely on our own duly calibrated national decisions” and would be “taken at appropriate points in time.” The Prime Minister’s use of the plural — “points in time,” “calibrated national decisions” — clearly indicates a separation process that would involve deliberately keeping some civilian facilities out of the safeguards declaration for some finite period of time.

Has the official line on separation changed since July 29? Is Mr .Saran's assessment on the ease with which all civilian facilities can be placed under safeguards correct, or is Dr. Kakodkar's plea that the PFBR and other R&D facilities must be kept out? As time elapses, it is becoming increasingly clear that the separation envisaged has to be a total, irrevocable and one-shot affair. Until now, both sides have been speaking about the need for New Delhi and Washington to fulfil their obligations under the July 18 agreement in tandem. Today, there is no room for any ambiguity: it is India that has to make the first move. "[B]efore we actually present any agreement to the Congress," [U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said](#) on October 26, "India needs to take several steps, including the separation of their civilian and military nuclear programs, so these are preconditions for us actually presenting this agreement to the Congress."

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