

US Coercion of India against Iran at IAEA

By [Siddharth Varadarajan](#)

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Siddharth Varadarajan (interviewed by Abbas Edalat) (source: CASMII)

Editor's note: In two crucial votes at the Governors' Board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in 2005 and 2006, India voted against Iran. The first time to condemn Iran for not meeting its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the second time to report Iran's file to the UN Security Council. Siddharth Varadarajan, the Associate Editor of The Hindu recently attended a talk in New Delhi in which Stephen Rademaker, the former US Assistant Secretary for International Security and Non-Proliferation, confessed that the US coerced India to vote against Iran in these two crucial cases. Abbas Edalat, CASMII's founder, spoke to Siddharth Varadarajan.

Abbas Edalat: Can you explain what Stephen Rademaker actually said in the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) meeting on Thursday 15th February 2007 about the US using coercion on India to vote against Iran in the Governors' Board of the IAEA? Did he use slides for his talk?

Siddharth Varadarajan: Mr. Stephen Rademaker was invited to speak at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, the premier Indian strategic affairs think-tank, which receives the bulk of its budget from the Indian Ministry of Defence. The meeting was on February 15, and the invitation was sent by email only on February 14 to all IDSA members as well as to journalists writing on strategic affairs. I am both a member of the IDSA and a journalist, so I can't say in what capacity I was invited! Incidentally, an IDSA official told me off the record later that it was the U.S. embassy in Delhi which had approached the Institute and requested it to organise Mr. Rademaker's lecture.

The invitation from IDSA Director Mr Narendra Sisodia noted that Mr. Rademaker, a "former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Non-Proliferation, will be visiting Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and speaking on "North Korea, Iran and the Emerging Nuclear Order" ... He will also be in a position to respond to questions regarding Indo-US Nuclear Deal."

Mr. Sisodia enclosed Mr. Rademaker's resume as well. In his introductory remarks, the IDSA director noted Mr. Rademaker's previous official affiliations and said he had left the US government at the end of December 2006 to join Barbour, Griffith and Rogers.

Mr. Rademaker began his talk — which was ostensibly about North Korea and Iran — with general observations about how India no longer regarded non-proliferation as a dirty word. He cited his own experience in high-level discussions with the Indians and mentioned the

July 2005 US-India nuclear deal as a watershed which helped bring about a major shift in Indian attitudes. One example of the change of mindset was India's willingness to adopt tough export-control laws. But, he added: "The best illustration of this is the two votes India cast against Iran at the IAEA. I am the first person to admit that the votes were coerced".

Mr. Rademaker noted that the Congressional hearings on the nuclear deal — in which a number of Senators and Congressmen had warned India to cooperate with the U.S. on Iran — had played a decisive role in this regard.

As for your question on whether he showed slides, Mr. Rademaker spoke from his own notes but there was no visual presentation.

AE: Exactly who was present at this meeting? Can you name any IDSA staff who were present there? Did any one take notes apart from yourself?

SV: The Director of IDSA, Mr. Narendra Sisodia was present and chaired the meeting. In all, there were about 20 persons, most of whom were IDSA researchers or members. I am not sure who else took notes but I am sure many did because what Mr. Rademaker said prompted lively and at times heated discussion.

AE: What do you think was Rademaker's motivation in being so boastful about coercion of India by the US?

SV: Well, he was really stating the obvious, and doing so at a time when he believed the Indian debate had moved on. But there was another reason — he was trying to tell the Indian audience that the U.S. would make further demands on India. For example, he openly said the US wanted India to join its unilateral sanctions against Iran in the likely event that Russia and China did not back tough UN sanctions. India should abandon its proposed gas pipeline from Iran, he said. India should do all these things if it wanted to be part of the "First World". There was no doubt that he was holding out a threat, from his vantage point as a former senior official of the Bush administration AND (and this is the irony) as a paid lobbyist of the Indian government. His firm, Barbour, Griffith and Rogers, has been retained by the Government of India.

AE: How would it be possible to further substantiate that Rademaker actually made this confession, apart from your own testimony?

SV: The IDSA does not wish to be drawn into a controversy because of its demi-official status. So no one from there will speak publicly. privately, however, many of its members and researchers have not only confirmed to me the accuracy of the remarks I quoted Mr. Rademaker as making but also communicated their gratitude at my decision to report the event in the Hindu.

Secondly, I think it is significant that Mr. Rademaker himself, the man at the centre of the controversy, has neither accused me nor the Hindu of misquoting him.

AE: What position did Rademaker have as a US official at the time of the two crucial votes by India against Iran in the IAEA board? Was he involved in the US-India negotiations for a nuclear cooperation deal?

SV: His official resume is quite clear: "In 2002, Mr. Rademaker was confirmed by the Senate as an Assistant Secretary of State, and from then until 2006 he headed at various times

three bureaus of the Department of State, including the Bureau of Arms Control and the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation. He directed nonproliferation policy toward Iran and North Korea, as well as the Proliferation Security Initiative. He also led semiannual strategic dialogues with Russia, China, India, and Pakistan, and headed U.S. delegations to numerous international conferences, including the 7th Review Conference of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 2005.”

He may not have been part of the inner circle of US officials who negotiated the July 2005 US-India deal but he had led many US delegations in strategic dialogues with India, including discussions on nuclear and proliferation issues.

In fact, he was in Delhi in June 2005 for official talks on proliferation issues and made a [public comment](#) even then that India would make a mistake if it went ahead with the Iran gas pipeline. The Economic Times of June 18, 2005 quoted him as saying: “We think it [the pipeline] would be a mistake. It would provide oil revenue to Iran that could be the basis of funding for weapons of mass destruction,”

As the State Department’s point person for arms control in 2005-2006, Rademaker was fully in the inter-agency loop in the Beltway evolving strategies to deal with Iran, one of which was to do what it takes to ensure India sides with the US in the crucial September 2005 IAEA Board of Governors meeting. If someone like Rademaker is willing to acknowledge that India’s votes there were “coerced”, there can be no doubt that this is an accurate reflection of the perception within the Bush administration in those days.

AE: Why is the nuclear deal with the US so important for the Government of India to allow itself to be coerced by the US to vote against Iran?

This is one of those strategic blunders which undercuts the Government of India’s claims to Great Power status for India. A country of India’s size should have had the diplomatic elan to open a way for nuclear commerce with the US while at the same time standing up for a rational and dialogue-based approach to the Iran nuclear issue. The two should not be mutually exclusive. India has a right to nuclear energy. And it has a right to have mutually beneficial relations with Iran, a country with which it shares deep cultural, civilisational and strategic interests. In energy terms, nuclear energy — even if the promised cooperation materialises — can only be an answer to India’s requirements in the long-term. For the short and medium term, India’s growth prospects depend more crucially on access to hydrocarbons from a mixed basket of sources, including Iran. Why India should go along and facilitate Washington’s drive to confrontation against that country is an abiding mystery.

AE: The fact that the US tried to coerce India to vote against Iran in the IAEA’s board is of course well established. In fact, as you know, David C. Mulford the US Ambassador to India is on the record, as reported by the BBC on 26th January 2006 for example, to have warned India that there would be no US-India nuclear deal if India did not vote against Iran at the IAEA board. He was indeed summoned for this remark by the Government of India and reprimanded. So what is so significant about Stephen Rademaker’s confession? Why is it any more embarrassing for India and the US compared to the original public remarks by the US Ambassador last year?

SV: Well, Rademaker is also our lobbyist now. So people in government are asking, if a guy who's supposed to be working for us speaks like this, what must the guys who are working against us be saying? That is why the Indian government didn't know how to react to what The Hindu reported. Their knee-jerk response was to get Ambassador Mulford to disown the remarks and even disown Rademaker. But Mulford's denial convinced no one. They then got Robert Blackwill, the former US Ambassador to India, to tell the Times of India in an "exclusive interview" that the US respects India's independence, and that there is no way any one could believe India could be coerced, and that Rademaker had been misquoted. Yeah, right! But again, no one believes these guys.

Last week Mr. Blackwill came to Delhi and CNBC's Karan Thapar asked me to join him in a half-hour debate on the nuclear deal and Iran. I agreed, and so did he. Apparently. But then his guys must have started doing their homework. My blog's IP tracker showed a number of hits from Barbour, Griffith and Rogers the night before the programme was to be recorded. And when I turned up at the TV studio, the anchorperson informed me that Blackwill wouldn't be coming to the programme after all as he had a "sore throat".

AE: Has any of the parties of the opposition raised the issue in any way in the parliament? If not, why not?

SV: The issue may be raised by the Opposition now that parliament is in session. The session opened last week and its time was taken up with the Budget and some other political controversies. But the Iran issue is a live one.

AE: Rademaker's confession was revealed by Hindu and Times of India but does not seem to have been reported in any main western media. How do you think this confession can impact on the legitimacy of the two decisions of Governors' Board of the IAEA, first to condemn Iran for non-compliance and then to report Iran's file to the UN Security Council?

SV: The biggest challenge to the legitimacy of the Indian vote in September 2005 was the official "[Explanation of Vote](#)" provided by the Indian ambassador to the IAEA. Remember, India voted "yes" to a resolution which found Iran in non-compliance with its safeguards obligations and which said Iran's nuclear programme therefore gave rise to questions which were a threat to international peace and security. But the Indian ambassador began his explanation by noting: "The Indian delegation has studied the draft resolution tabled by the EU-3 yesterday. There are elements in the draft which we have difficulty with... [F]inding Iran non-compliant in the context of Article XII-C of the Agency's Statute is not justified. It would also not be accurate to characterize the current situation as a threat to international peace and security."

Please read that statement again slowly! So why did India vote for the resolution referring the Iran file to the UN Security Council (UNSC) when it disagreed with the two main triggers? Because apparently "more time" has allegedly been given for the file to be studied at the IAEA Board before sending it on to the UNSC! The explanation made no sense. The vote made no sense, when related to the clear belief of India that Iran was not non-compliant. And yet we voted against Iran, knowing full well the US wanted to take the matter to the UNSC and thereby remove the IAEA from the driver's seat.

AE: Do you think other member states of the Governors' Board of the IAEA were also put under pressure by the US and its European allies to vote

against Iran? If so what evidence is there for such coercion?

SV: Undoubtedly. I recently had the occasion to meet a senior delegation from a European member country of the P5+1. Privately, these officials, who deal with Iran, were skeptical about the current US approach but said their government was unable to resist Washington's pressure. If this is the case with a major European power, you can imagine the fate of "lesser" IAEA Board members.

AE: Given the US Ambassador's public threats against the Government of India in January 2006, one would have expected Dr Elbradei, the Director General of the IAEA to declare as illegitimate any vote against Iran in the IAEA's Governors' Board on February 4th 2006. Is there not an analogy here with a court of law in which a sentence against the accused is obtained by coercion of witnesses or jury members?

SV: I believe the entire votes in September 2005 and February 2006 were ultra vires the IAEA Statute. There was simply no justification in sending Iran's case to the UNSC. The bigger problem is that the issue has become so politicised that the IAEA Secretariat itself is unable to function under objective criteria. I mean, the IAEA inspectors are expected to certify that Iran has no undeclared nuclear activity. Give the current climate of politically manipulated hysteria, no IAEA inspector, with the best of intentions, will find it easy to issue such a certificate even if Iran were to give 200 per cent cooperation. This is the crux of the matter. Like in Iraq, Iran and the IAEA have been tasked with proving a negative.

AE: When the Western leaders accuse Iran of concealing its nuclear programme for 18 years, they never make any mention of the systematic US efforts after the Iranian revolution of 1979 to prevent western and non-western governments and companies, in violation of the Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, to collaborate with Iran in developing its civilian nuclear technology. Has the Governors' Board of the IAEA ever looked into these US violations when discussing Iran's file?

SV: I wrote about the issue of the US denying Iran its rights under the NPT going back to the 1980s in [The Hindu](#) on 22 August 2006.

Since the IAEA Statute commits the agency to provide technical assistance to member states, a team of experts travelled to Iran to interact with scientists at ENTEC the Iranian atomic establishment set up in 1974 with French assistance to work on the fuel cycle. According to an account provided by Mark Hibbs in *Nuclear Fuel*, one of the most authoritative newsletters of the international nuclear industry, the IAEA experts recommended that the agency assist ENTEC to help their scientists overcome their lack of practical experience. They also suggested that the IAEA provide expert services in a number of areas including the fuel cycle.

But the promised IAEA help never materialised. According to Mr. Hibbs: "Sources said that when in 1983 the recommendations of an IAEA mission to Iran were passed on to the IAEA's technical cooperation program, the U.S. government then 'directly intervened' to discourage the IAEA from assisting Iran in production of UO₂ and UF₆. 'We stopped that in its tracks,' said a former U.S. official." Rebuffed by the IAEA, Iran signed an agreement with Argentina, only to have Washington force Buenos Aires to back off in 1992. Five years later,

the Clinton administration got China to abandon its official assistance to Iran on the fuel cycle.

AE: What is the consequence of such US abuse of the IAEA for the future of the IAEA and the NPT?

SV: I believe the US strategy is to so frustrate Iran that the Iranian leadership is trapped into denouncing the IAEA and NPT and walking out of both. Needless to say, the US approach is making more likely, rather than less, the prospects of further nuclear breakout. Proliferation risks must be dealt with through a combination of technical, legal and political fixes. All countries, whether in the NPT or outside it, have the right to pursue a fuel cycle. NPT states must guarantee the cycle is peaceful and IAEA inspections verify the same. The US wants to abrogate that right. Iran is a test case. But there will be others too in the years to come.

AE: How should journalists, peace activists and antiwar lawmakers in western countries use Rademaker's confession to oppose the US in using the UN Security Council to obtain a veneer of legitimacy for its war drive against Iran?

SV: They should publicise his remarks as widely as possible. The U.S. is pulling out all the stops in its drive to confront Iran. The world must prevent at all costs the possibility of another illegal and disastrous war.

Siddharth Varadarajan is Associate Editor of The Hindu, India's most respected and authoritative English-language newspaper. His writings on the Iran nuclear issue won the Elizabeth Neuffer memorial silver medal for excellence in reporting in 2005, a prestigious award handed out by the United Nations Correspondents Association in New York. His personal website is <http://svaradarajan.blogspot.com/> and he can be reached at svaradarajan@gmail.com

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