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*The Indo-US Nuclear Deal:
Struggle to Defend National Sovereignty*

The civilian nuclear cooperation deal with the United States is only one part of the wide-ranging alliance that the UPA government sought to forge with the United States. The strategic alliance with the United States as stated in the joint statement of July 2005 by the Indian Prime Minister and the US President has four aspects. The political, which involves India joining the US bandwagon of “spreading democracy” around the world; the economic, involving a strategic partnership based on a blueprint for US capital; the military, expressed through the Defence Framework Agreement; and fourthly the Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.

Prior to the joint statement of July 2005, the UPA government signed a ten-year Defence Framework Agreement with the United States. It is evident that without the defence agreement, the Americans would not have agreed for the nuclear cooperation. This seems to be part of a *quid pro quo*.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE WITH US

The Manmohan Singh government has followed on the footsteps of the BJP-led government in accepting the US rhetoric on democracy. All the India-US joint statements accord primacy to “democracy” and “freedom.” This implicitly conveys the message that India is politically and ideologically with the US in its crusade to project democracy and freedom as weapons to enforce regime change, prise open economies and establish US hegemony in countries and regions. If the BJP-led government enthusiastically joined the democracy bandwagon by co-sponsoring the Community of Democracies the UPA government embraced the Global Democracy Initiative announced in the July 2005 joint statement. The UPA government has forked out \$10 million for the UN Democracy Fund, which has been set up under US urging.

Two significant steps in the economic sphere were announced in the Bush-Manmohan Singh joint statement issued during the Bush visit to India in March 2006. A report of the US-India CEO Forum titled “US-India Strategic Economic Partnership,” which was released during the Bush visit, was welcomed in the joint statement “agreeing to consider its recommendations.” Secondly, a US-India Agricultural Knowledge Initiative, which was announced during Manmohan Singh’s US visit, was formally launched. The unequal nature of the strategic economic partnership between the American and Indian corporates can be gauged from the fact that 21 out of the 30 recommendations of the CEO Forum were exclusively meant for India, most of them in the form of demands for policy changes related to specific sectors of the Indian economy to the obvious benefits of the US corporates. This includes liberalization of norms for Infrastructure investments, market-driven reforms in the Power and Oil & Gas sector, further liberalization of the Telecom sector and ensuring a “level playing field” between

the private and public sector telecom companies, raising the FDI cap in the Insurance sector, liberalization of norms for FDI in Banking, liberalization of FDI norms in Retail Trade, removal of FDI caps in sectors such as print media, broadcasting, cable and satellite systems and e-commerce, liberalizing restrictions on FDI in the Real Estate and initiating urban reforms like removal of urban land ceiling, reducing stamp duty etc., liberalization of Defence Procurement norms, liberalization of FDI in Higher Education and so on. The Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, who also co-chairs India-US Economic Dialogue, had promptly announced the formation of 24 committees to take the recommendations of the CEO Forum forward. While such alacrity to serve the interests of the US corporates met with domestic opposition, the Report of the CEO Forum continues to be displayed in the official website of the Planning Commission. The CEO Forum recommendations have since been earnestly pursued by the UPA government, often overriding the NCMP.

The vision of foreign and domestic agribusiness driven agriculture underlying the Agricultural Knowledge Initiative is inappropriate for a country like India dominated by peasant agriculture. The efforts by the UPA government to allow large scale procurement of foodgrain by corporates, promote contract farming and futures trading in foodgrain and open up retail trade to FDI are influenced by such a distorted vision, which is in conflict with the commitments made in the NCMP.

DEFENCE AGREEMENT

The ten-year Defence Framework Agreement was signed in June 2005. It was a precursor to the joint statement issued in July, just three weeks later. Such a wide-ranging military collaboration agreement has not been signed by India with any country since independence. The agreement provides for joint operations by the two armed forces in military operations outside the auspices of the United Nations; the agreement aims “interoperability” of the armed forces; the two sides will work for missile defence cooperation; sale of US weapons to India and co-production is another feature.

Under this pact, India has agreed to work out a Logistics Support Agreement (otherwise known as the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement) with the United States and a Maritime Security Cooperation between the two navies. Regular joint exercises and military training of Indian officers in the United States are already underway. This Defence Framework Agreement alone is sufficient to change the entire security and strategic orientation of India.

Following the announcement of the bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement in July 2007, Nicholas Burns, the Under Secretary of State, who was responsible for negotiating the bilateral agreement, in the official briefing after the 123 agreement was reached, said: “And I think now that we have consummated the civil nuclear trade between us, if we look down the road in the future, we’re going to see far greater defence cooperation between the United State and India: training; exercises; we hope, defence sales of American military technology to the Indian armed forces.”

IMPLICATIONS OF THE HYDE ACT

The intentions of the Bush Administration in working out a nuclear cooperation deal with India have unfolded since the July 2005 announcement. The discussions on the

draft legislation in House of Representatives and the Senate, the briefings given by the Administration to the subcommittees of both houses and the Hyde Act, which was eventually adopted, make one fact clear. The United States sees the nuclear cooperation deal as a key instrument to bind India to the US global strategy.

However, the situation changed after the US Congress adopted the final legislation to give a waiver for nuclear cooperation with India. This legislation known as the Hyde Act runs contrary to most of the assurances given by the Prime Minister in August 2006. The Act includes provisions imposing restrictions on transfer of technology and barring access to dual use technologies, thus denying India a full nuclear fuel cycle. The US President has to report to the Congress every year on how India is complying with the provisions set out in the Hyde Act. The Act enjoins on the administration to prevent fuel supplies and equipment from other countries to India if the US terminates the bilateral agreement. The argument that the bilateral text overrides the clause cannot be accepted, as the text also states that “national laws” will prevail. To say that the Hyde Act is not binding on India is irrelevant. The point is that it is binding on the United States.

IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICY

Outside the sphere of nuclear cooperation, the Hyde Act contains directions on India's foreign policy and other security related matters. There are repeated references to India's role having to be one of support and complicity with the US designs on Iran. The demand in the Hyde Act that India should have a foreign policy “congruent” to that of the United States, the expectation that India would join the Proliferation Security Initiative, and other demands, reveal how the US expects India to conform as an ally.

The joint statement in September 2005 and February 2006 was followed immediately by India's *volte-face* on Iran in the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA), on two occasions. These moves against Iran at the IAEA, to which India became a party, set the stage for imposing immediate sanctions and later, an armed attack on Iran. Bush officials have now made public that India succumbed to the US pressure in IAEA. US Senator Richard G. Lugar in his opening remarks in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had noted, approvingly, “We have already seen strategic benefits from our improving relationship with India. India's votes at the IAEA on the Iran issue last September and this past February demonstrate that New Delhi is able and willing to adjust its traditional foreign policies and play a constructive role on international issues.”

The bilateral “123” agreement that was finally concluded in July 2007 has failed to adhere to the assurances given by the Prime Minister. The text makes it clear that there will be a bar on transfer of technology dealing with enrichment, reprocessing and heavy water; there will be restrictions on access to dual use technology for these purposes, thus denying what the Prime Minister assured of cooperation for the full nuclear fuel cycle. Moreover, the assurance of an uninterrupted fuel supply is worded in such a manner which allows the “national law” to prevail, in this case the Hyde Act.

NUCLEAR DEAL AND ENERGY

The major argument advanced by the UPA government is that the nuclear agreement is vital for India to end its nuclear isolation, without which it will not be possible to meet the country's energy requirements in the future. This ignores the very limited

contribution that nuclear power makes to our overall energy generation which is less than 3 per cent. It cannot exceed 7 per cent even if the ambitious plans for expansion to 20,000 MW are implemented by 2020.

While talking about energy security, the cost of nuclear power has to be factored in. We should continue to develop nuclear technology based on the three-phased programme. But the expansion of nuclear power cannot become the central focus for energy security. The cost of power per unit generated for imported nuclear reactor will be twice that of a coal-based plant. The capital required to set up a plant with an imported reactor will be thrice that of a coal-based plant. So, what does it mean in terms of investment to set a target of 20,000 MW of nuclear power by 2020, or the more ambitious 40,000 MW target set out by the Prime Minister? The government has not conducted any techno-economic study on the feasibility and cost of nuclear power.

The implementation of the nuclear cooperation agreement will hamper the pursuit of an self-reliant nuclear technology policy for peaceful purposes based on the three-phase nuclear energy programme. There will be an unacceptable price to be paid. While negotiating for the nuclear deal, the United States simultaneously opposed India going ahead with the Iran pipeline project. The strategic alliance with the US will constrain India from accessing energy from Iran and working for an Asian energy security grid which will link Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia.

After the Hyde Act was adopted in December 2006, the CPI(M) had stated that it contains provisions which are contrary to the assurances given by the Prime Minister to Parliament on August 17, 2006. The CPI(M) had repeatedly asked the government not to proceed with the bilateral negotiations for the 123 agreement, till this matter was cleared up. But the government did not heed this advice too.

CPI(M) STAND: STRATEGY

Keeping all these factors regarding the nuclear deal in view, how did the CPI(M) formulate its stand and act? The CPI(M) programme, i.e. strategy, sets out the anti-imperialist task as a basic one alongwith the anti-feudal and anti-monopoly tasks. The fight against imperialist globalisation is to be carried on along with the fight against imperialist penetration within our country. As the programme states, "The imperialist driven globalisation and the policies of liberalisation adopted by the Indian ruling classes have heightened the imperialist penetration in all spheres in our country." (Para 3.25) The growing collaboration of the ruling classes in India with imperialism has also found its reflection in foreign policy. As the Programme points out, "The turn away from self reliance and recourse to foreign capital and liberalisation helped imperialism to further pressurise India which has manifested in several policy positions." Further, "The danger to foreign policy is real as the United States has long term plans to draw India into a strategic alliance to subserve its global designs against China and Russia". (Para 4.4)

This strategic perspective states that "A major struggle lies ahead for the Left and democratic forces to fight back the pro-imperialist direction in foreign policy and ensure that foreign policy retains its non-aligned basis and orientation to ward off imperialist pressures." (Para 4.6)

Forging a strategic alliance with the United States is a major step towards aligning India with US imperialism. Being a basic issue of strategy concerning the fight against US imperialism, the CPI(M) is irrevocably against this step.

TACTICAL LINE

It is based on this strategic perspective that the Political Resolution of the 18th Congress of the Party while analysing the dangers of the current situation stated:

The Party and the Left have to be vigilant about the role of imperialism, which the bourgeois parties ignore. But in domestic economic and political affairs and in foreign policy, the influence of imperialism and particularly the USA has grown. Here again, except for some shift in emphasis, the strategic collaboration with the US and its deep inroads remain. (Para 2.80)

It further underlined the link between the struggle against communalism, economic policies and imperialism by defining the present task as:

The struggle against communalism and the economic policies are in fact connected to the anti-imperialist task, as both the Hindutva forces and the liberalisers are distinguished by their pro-imperialism. (Para 2.97)

The Party was enjoined to:

take up the issue of foreign policy, oppose the succumbing to the pressure from imperialist finance capital and to work to check the imperialist influence penetrating different spheres of society. (Para 2.92)

In conclusion, the political resolution gave four major slogans to provide a direction to the Party. Alongwith an all-sided struggle against communalism; building a strong movement against the harmful economic policies of the central government and for alternative policies; the third slogan called upon the Party to oppose US imperialist aggression globally and imperialist penetration in the country. Finally, all these three slogans are to be taken forward to strengthen the Left and democratic forces in the country.

Thus based on the strategic understanding, the current political-tactical line of the Party has given importance to the struggle against the growing influence of US imperialism in the country and the task of the Party and the working class to unite all anti-imperialist and progressive forces to fight back this trend.

CONFRONTATION WITH UPA GOVERNMENT

The confrontation with the UPA government on the strategic alliance with the United States and foreign policy did not come about suddenly with the finalisation of the nuclear deal. The Party Polit Bureau and the Central Committee had been noting since July 2005 the dangers inherent in the “strategic partnership” announced during the visit of the Prime Minister to Washington in July 2005. The Central Committee had noted in March 2006:

In the last nine months, one of the main issues between the UPA government and the Left that came to the fore is the Indo-US strategic alliance and India’s foreign policy. On the Iran

nuclear issue, the government once again voted for reporting the matter to the Security Council in February 4, 2006. The whole situation will be changing with the new Indo-US equation and the strategic tie up. Our Party must understand the serious danger posed by this orientation of the UPA government. It will have serious repercussions for our economic sovereignty, independent foreign policy and lives of the working people.

When the UPA government went ahead and finalised the 123 bilateral agreement for nuclear cooperation with the United States in the third week of July 2007, the Party was faced with the question of what to do with an agreement that would cement the emerging Indo-US strategic alliance that would have profound implications on our foreign policy and national sovereignty. The Party was faced also with the issue of how a government supported by the Left can be allowed to go ahead to forge such a strategic alliance with US imperialism.

NO COMPROMISE ON STRATEGIC TIE-UP

The decision of the Polit Bureau which was endorsed by the Central Committee to block the agreement from going ahead was also governed by the fact that if US imperialism succeeded in making India its strategic ally, it would have its impact on the international correlation of forces. India getting integrated into US global strategy would be a “strategic gain” for the United States, in the words of the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

As a Party committed to fighting against imperialist hegemony and promoting multipolarity in international relations, it was inconceivable for the CPI(M) to support a government which facilitated such an alliance. The nuclear deal is the centre-piece of the overarching alliance the US is keen to draw India into. Once such an agreement is operationalised India would be locked into a strategic tie-up which would have a long lasting impact on India’s foreign policy and strategic autonomy.

Therefore, taking all the factors into account both external and internal, the CPI(M) Central Committee took a considered decision that all measures should be adopted, including if necessary, withdrawal of support, to prevent the UPA government from going ahead with operationalising the deal.

After two months of sustained campaign and mounting pressure on the UPA government, the Congress leadership finally decided to shelve the operationalisation of the nuclear deal. The stand of the CPI(M) and the Left also convinced the other partners of the UPA that it was not worthwhile to risk the fall of the government on this issue. This has been a significant step forward in the ongoing struggle to defend national sovereignty and an independent foreign policy. The Left succeeded in making foreign policy and strategic relations with the US the main issue in national politics. In the process, the BJP was exposed as a pro-imperialist party. It began to reiterate that while it objects to certain features of the nuclear deal, it is for a strategic alliance with the United States.

CARRY ON STRUGGLE AGAINST US IMPERIALISM

The CPI(M) conducted an extensive campaign amongst the people explaining how the strategic alliance and the nuclear deal will affect national sovereignty, an independent

foreign policy and adversely impact on the livelihood of the people and their economic rights.

The united stand of the Left parties, the support it received from scientists, intellectuals, professional and the working people have opened up the possibilities for widening and deepening the struggle against imperialist penetration and defence of national sovereignty.