

## **DEFEND INDIA'S INTERESTS: (4)**

### **NO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH AMERICA**

The Nuclear Deal is a part of a much larger program in which India is to become a partner in the US's strategic vision. This is what Condoleezza Rice before the US Congress "India is a natural partner for the United States ... The initiative, first and foremost, will deepen that strategic partnership. The United States and India are laying the foundation for cooperation on major issues in the region and beyond..." Therefore this deal should be seen as a part of Manmohan Singh Government's attempt to integrate India more closely with the US.

In foreign policy, one of the major steps was signing of the 10-year defence pact "New Framework for India-US Defence Relationship" in Washington on June 28, 2005, just before the Manmohan Singh-Bush Agreement of July 18, 2005, thus extending the "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership" signed earlier in 2001 by the BJP-led NDA. This agreement states, "US-India defence relationship derives from a common belief in freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and seeks to advance shared security interests". The US invaded illegally Iraq under the bogus claim of bringing democracy to West Asia; India's entering into this agreement, which talks about a *shared belief* in "democracy and rule of law" with the US, was a good indication of where India's foreign policy was going.

The Defence Framework Agreement is sweeping in its scope, and ties India closely to the US through joint military exercises, joint planning, joint operations in other countries and defence procurement. This defence pact specifically states that India and the US will "conclude defence transactions, not solely as ends in and of themselves, but as a means to... reinforce our strategic partnership."

The Manmohan Singh Bush agreement 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." Manmohan Singh's claims that India's foreign policy would not change due to this Deal, is not borne out by his Governments' record.

The next step, and the most serious of all, is the Logistics and Service Agreement, which the Manmohan Singh Government is currently negotiating with the US. This is widely known as the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which the US already has with several countries, mostly the NATO nations. This initiative seeks to convert India into an Asian outpost of NATO. It essentially allows refuelling and complete access facilities to all US ships and aircraft. Put simply, the US navy can bomb Iraq and Iran and then come to India's ports for rest, recreation and refuelling, before going back for another round of hostilities. Step by step, from a vote against Iran, we are now to become hosts to the US navy in its military misadventures in West Asia and elsewhere. The Logistics and Service Agreement as well as the Defence Framework, has also requirements of "interoperability" between the Indian and US armed forces. This calls for both sides to have the same equipment so that military personnel of both sides can use each other's equipment and operate better together. This also means spares can be shared by the two sides. That is why such agreements invariably lead to buying of US arms, particularly expensive aircraft and missiles. Billions of dollars of US fighter aircrafts like F-16 and F/A-18A and missiles would be sold to India following this agreement.

If this were not enough, we have also become willing partners to the US in a de facto alliance in Asia. Nothing else can explain why Indian navy should join in the naval exercises of trilateral countries – the US, Japan and Australia in the Bay of Bengal. It seems that the plan is to gradually expand the trilateral countries to include India and become the quartet. It is known that the US strategic thinking calls for "full spectrum" dominance in all possible theatres. In Asia, the US has been handicapped because in the entire Eastern, South-Eastern and South Asian region, it has only one major military base – in Okinawa, Japan. The only other base it has in this region is in the Indian Ocean, in Diego Garcia. Getting India to join the US designs in Asia is therefore a major breakthrough for the US. The question is what benefit does India get in becoming a part of this US vision? Is this in the interest of India's independent foreign policy?

#### *Indian Military Acquisitions from the US*

While the India-US nuclear deal is yet to be clinched, the US has already managed to use the promised deal to secure several valuable defence contracts and to position itself well on future Indian orders. And for the first time since independence, a process of Americanization of the Indian military has begun.

According to defence ministry projections, India is expected to acquire about US \$ 30 billion (Rs.135,000 crore) of military equipment during the 11th Plan period 2007-2012, making India the largest arms purchaser in the developing world. Since the 1960s, this huge market had been closed to US defence contractors, initially because of US antagonism to India's friendly ties with the

Soviet Union and later due to formal sanctions imposed by the US in response to India's nuclear test of 1974 and the weapons test in 1998. These sanctions were lifted in 2001 when the Indo-US defence partnership was initiated. After decades, therefore, US defence firms are drooling at the prospect of multi-billion dollar contracts in India. And this at a time when the US military-industrial complex is concerned at a possible slowdown in US defence purchases.

The first major sale of US military hardware to India has been the refurbished warship, the USS Trenton renamed INS Jalashwa or "water horse," and is India's second largest naval combat vessel. The ship has been acquired for around \$ 480 million (Rs.2,160 crores). The other large transaction has been the acquisition of 6 US-made Hercules C-130 J military transport aircraft with an option for buying an additional 6. This \$1 billion deal (Rs.4,500 crore) is India's largest with the US. Again, the transporters mark a shift from the traditional Soviet/Russian-origin transport fleet used by the Indian defence forces. The Hercules C-130J's are heavily armed, come with advanced avionics and electronic counter-measures and are to be used to air-lift special forces modelled after the US special forces used for offensive and usually covert operations far from home. This "convergence" is an integral part of the growing strategic partnership between India and the US who see the very real possibility of joint operations.

There have been other US arms sales as well although not of the same scale, such as 12 Weapon Locating Radars from US arms manufacturer Raytheon at a cost of \$200 million. Discussions are underway by Lockheed Martin of the US to sell India 8 P3-C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft at a cost of US\$ 650 million, with a sweetener of 16 multi-mission MH-60R Sikorsky helicopters costing about \$400 million. And Raytheon is eagerly awaiting an order for its Patriot PAC-3 anti-missile systems.

The big one everyone is closely watching is the estimated \$ 10 billion (Rs.45,000 crore) deal for 126 multi-role combat aircraft for which India is expected to float global tenders very soon. US manufacturers Boeing and Lockheed-Martin are lobbying very hard to sell their F/A-18 and F-16 fighters, even though these aircraft do not really fit the IAF's requirements, using the nuclear deal as bait. "123=126" is the slogan going around in the US.

The US is of course playing its cards carefully, holding back cutting-edge technologies and weapons systems until it has India firmly in its strategic bag. Thus, the US has not yet cleared the Patriot sales, or sale of the more advanced Arrow missile defence systems, and is offering only the P3-C Orions, which it has also sold to Pakistan rather than the more advanced E2 Hawkeye airborne early warning aircraft.

On its part, India has also been approaching the American armaments industry through US ally Israel both directly and indirectly, since many Israeli

systems have either been jointly developed along with US companies or depend on US components and technologies in different ways. In the past decade or so, coinciding with the opening up of India to the US in defence matters, Israel has emerged as a front-runner among India's arms suppliers. India is today Israel's biggest arms export market, having purchased \$1.5 billion (Rs.6,700 crore) worth of military hardware from Israel during 2002-06 out of worldwide Israeli arms sales of \$2.76 billion! The Indian order in 2004 for 3 Phalcon Airborne Early-Warning (AEW) radars mounted on Russian Ilyushin Il-76 planes is Israel's biggest contract so far at \$1.1 billion. India has also bought the Israeli Green Pine radar system but is awaiting a US green signal on the US-Israeli Arrow system. India has also acquired a variety of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) from Israel and the Barak anti-ship missiles (which notoriously figured in the Tehelka expose during the NDA regime).

Speaking of Baraks, it is not mere coincidence that recently appointed Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak (who shares the name meaning "lightning" with the missile!) is soon to visit Delhi. He is seeking to close a deal for co-development with India of unmanned helicopter gunships, a technology jointly researched by Israel and the US, the deal clearly having been cleared by Washington. The proposal follows quickly after \$2.5 billion long-range surface-to-air missile (LRSAM) joint venture project between Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and concerned Indian entities for use by the Indian Navy.

In all these developments, what is clear is that US and Israeli companies are beginning to exercise enormous influence on India currently massive defence purchases. Although the US entered the race very late, its companies are openly being spoken of by French and Russian rivals as front-runners for the huge fighter deal due to the pressures of the nuclear deal. India had almost finalized a long-delayed \$600 million contract with the European consortium Eurocopter for supply of 197 light helicopters when the entire purchase appears to have been suddenly put on hold due to US pressure in favour of US manufacturer Bell. In May this year, US administration officials and Bell executives are said to have met with India's Ambassador in Washington, Ronen Sen, to express their reservations about the deal going to Eurocopter and their voices seem to have been heard. It is no wonder that Russia, India's long-standing military hardware supplier, is upset at this increasingly visible trend of purchasing only from Israel and the US.

The point is not that India should not diversify its arms purchases or should not purchase from this or that source. But it is becoming painfully obvious that India is increasingly shifting its acquisitions towards the US and its Israeli proxy. Once it is tied into the US and Israeli arms, India will be continuously under pressure to behave or risk losing its military capability. The danger of importing all its arms purchase so narrowly is not only to lose self-reliance in manufacture but also to be open to blackmail and therefore its independence in foreign policy.

The obsession with a strategic partnership with the US is driven by a belief that the US will “help” India become a “superpower”. This distorted ‘great power’ ambition of the Indian policy makers is based on an acceptance of US hegemony and an abandoning of the long cherished goals of Non-Alignment. While these may be the dreams of a small section benefiting from current neo-liberal globalisation, it does not reflect a foreign policy vision that is in the interests of the overwhelming majority of Indian people.