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Addressing the “Expectations Gap”
A Report of the CSIS South Asia Program and the Nuclear Threat Initiative

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INDIA AND THE NONPROLIFERATION INSTITUTIONS: ADDRESSING THE “EXPECTATIONS GAP”

C. Raja Mohan

Since the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came into force in 1970, India and the United States steadily drifted apart on the range of issues relating to the management of nuclear weapons. On both the vertical and horizontal spread of nuclear weapons, the gap between the Indian and American positions began to widen inexorably. India, which was one of the original sponsors of the proposal for a nonproliferation treaty, became one of the treaty’s most bitter and articulate critics. Once a supporter of arms control agreements like the test ban and nuclear freeze, and an eager supporter of even partial agreements like the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), India by the mid 1970s was opposing most nuclear arms control arrangements. The Indian nuclear test in 1974 and the consequent sanctions imposed by the United States further divided the two nations. The Washington that was once an enthusiastic supporter of Delhi’s plans for advanced technology development—the United States was a much-valued partner in the development of India’s fledgling nuclear and space programs in the 1950s and 1960s—became a vehement protestor in the 1970s. As the United States expanded its national controls on transfer of high-technology items and materials after 1974 and goaded the international system to adopt similar rules, India became one of the main targets of the tightening regime on technology denial to potential proliferators.

India’s nuclear tests in 1998 resulted in new sanctions from the United States adding to the bitterness. The bilateral dialogue on nuclear issues that developed during 1998–2000 tinkered at the edge of the huge gulf that separated the two nations. A bolder effort by the George W. Bush administration during 2001–2008 produced the historic and controversial civil nuclear initiative that ended India’s nearly three and a half decades of isolation from the global nuclear order. The deal involved the United States changing its own domestic law and the international rules governing transfers of civil nuclear technology and materials. India in turn agreed to separate its civilian and military nuclear programs, place the former under international safeguards, and support the global nonproliferation regime. The United States’ willingness to live with India’s nuclear weapons and facilitate international cooperation with its civilian nuclear program was a breakthrough in bringing Delhi closer to being a partner in the global nuclear order. But a few

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critical obstacles continue to prevent the consolidation of India’s partnership with the nonproliferation regime. This report is an attempt to address those issues to the mutual satisfaction of Delhi and Washington.

**NPT and the Indian Exception**

The civil nuclear initiative was constructed based on a clear recognition in the Bush administration that India will never accede to the NPT in the present form. It also meant that the Bush policy departed from its predecessor’s understanding on India’s nuclear weapon program. The Clinton administration’s mantra was to “cap, roll back, and eventually eliminate” India’s nuclear and missile programs. The Bush administration discarded this approach and recognized the value of a more flexible approach that would bring India on board as a supporter of the nonproliferation system without being a signatory to the NPT. It also had the additional advantage of ending the prolonged nuclear dispute between the two countries and creating the basis for a long-term strategic partnership between Washington and Delhi.

The Obama administration has chosen to go along with the civil nuclear initiative and implement it fully by completing the residual formalities such as the prior consent for reprocessing of spent fuel derived from future American-supplied equipment and material. Yet despite a measure of continuity in Washington, the potential for recrimination on nonproliferation has increased amidst a change in the broader approach to arms control under the Obama administration. India’s new position as a supporter of the nonproliferation system but as a nonsignatory to the NPT remains vulnerable to attack from many quarters. Expanding Indo-U.S. cooperation on nonproliferation demands considerable sophistication in how the two sides think and handle the NPT, which is seen as the cornerstone of the nonproliferation regime.

One set of issues relates to the “universalization” of the NPT that continues to resonate among the non-nuclear signatories to the treaty and among the policymakers in Washington who find it hard to dismiss it. As expected, there were strong calls at the just-concluded 2010 review conference of the NPT for India, Pakistan, and Israel to become signatories. The U.S. officials sought to finesse the proposition by supporting the principle but acknowledging the difficulties of getting the three to become full parties. On the eve of the NPT review, the U.S. ambassador to the conference, Susan Burk, was asked specifically about U.S. policy towards the NPT membership of North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Israel. Burk replied:

> Well, if the question is why are we going to push them to join the NPT, I don’t think we’re pushing countries to join the NPT. North Korea was a party to the NPT as you know and they announced that they were withdrawing. And the United States has been engaged in negotiations with partners to see if North Korea can be persuaded to come back into full compliance with the treaty. So that’s a separate case. The other three states have never joined the treaty. And I think, as I said, the goal—the United States has
supported the goal for a very long time of universal adherence to the NPT. We haven’t abandoned that goal, but I think we’re down to three cases that are not similar and we have to deal with each country on a case-by-case basis.²

On other occasions, though, U.S. officials had to sound far more definitive about demanding that India join the NPT and make it a universal treaty.

On the Indian side there is considerable anxiety about a possible reversal in Washington of the Bush policy of treating India in an exceptional manner. So any reference to the universalization of the NPT brings forth quick reactions from Indian officialdom about why India will not join the ‘discriminatory NPT.” When a summit of the United Nations Security Council in September 2009 passed Resolution 1887 urging among other things the “universalization of the NPT,”³ India’s permanent representative to the UN was quick to respond in a formal letter to the UNSC:

India’s position on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is well known. We cannot accept any obligations arising from treaties that India has not signed or ratified. This position is consistent with the fundamental principles of international law and the Law of Treaties. India cannot accept calls for universalization of the NPT. As India’s Prime Minister stated in Parliament on 29 July, 2009, there is no question of India joining the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. Nuclear weapons are an integral part of India’s national security and will remain so, pending nondiscriminatory and global nuclear disarmament.⁴

Clearly there is no question of India joining the NPT. There has been some confusion recently about the prospect of India becoming a member of the NPT as a nuclear weapon state.⁵ Much of this argumentation is built on a vague response from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in response to questions by journalist and author Fareed Zakaria:

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ZAKARIA: Is it fair to say that one of the ultimate objectives of India would perhaps be to become a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty system, but to be invited in as a nuclear weapons state in the way that China was?

MANMOHAN SINGH, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA: Well, if we were to go that way, that would be a very positive development from our point of view. And we are a nuclear weapons state, but we are a responsible nuclear power. We have an impeccable record of not having contributed to unauthorized proliferation of these weapons of mass destruction.
So, I think India does require, I think, greater consideration of the global community.

ZAKARIA: Do you think that the United States should try to press the issue and have India brought into the system as a nuclear weapons state?

SINGH: Well, I hope it will happen.

Why would an Indian prime minister object if Delhi were invited by the United States to join the NPT as a nuclear weapon state? The problem, however, lies elsewhere—in the reality that any revision of the treaty, let alone a decision to recognize India as a nuclear weapon state, is virtually impossible given the complexity of the process involved.

The issue then is not whether India signs the NPT. What matters is Delhi’s approach to the nonproliferation regime. Is India a partner of the NPT system or a permanent outsider and protestor? As one of the world’s nuclear weapon powers and as a nation with plans to build a large commercial atomic energy program, I believe, it is in India’s interest to strengthen the NPT and the broader nonproliferation regime. Any suggestion that India should endorse and support the NPT, however, generates considerable unease in Delhi’s political classes, which have long denounced the treaty as “discriminatory.” Whatever may have been the original reasons for Indian opposition to the NPT, they do not apply in the changed international context marked by India’s own status as an emerging great power and the civil nuclear initiative that Delhi negotiated with the Nuclear Suppliers Group at the end of 2008. For all its rhetoric against the NPT, Delhi is not unaware that the rest of the world in large numbers has accepted the treaty and stuck with it for four decades. Practically every nation in the world is now part of the NPT, except India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea.

Delhi is also aware that discrimination was not the central reason for its opposition to the NPT, which was negotiated in the mid-1960s and came into force in 1970. It was about India’s security in a world of nuclear weapons. Once China tested its first atomic weapon in October 1964, barely two years after the Sino-Indian border conflict, India had no choice but to search for a measure of nuclear security. India first tried getting nuclear security guarantees from the major powers—Great Britain, the United States, and Soviet Russia. When it could not, Delhi went to the United Nations seeking a multilateral treaty to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. When the NPT that

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came out of this process was not satisfactory, Delhi chose to stay out, citing reasons of inequity. But once it declared itself a nuclear weapon power and initiated reconciliation with the international order, there is no reason at all for Delhi to use ideological arguments against the NPT. At the NPT review conference in May 2010, the word “discrimination” was in fact being thrown at Delhi. The complaint was about the exception that had been granted to Delhi by the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008 as part of the implementation of the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear initiative.

Delhi must find a way to emerge as a more vocal and practical supporter of the NPT system. It surely will not be the first to adapt its nuclear policy to changed circumstances. China, for example, had decreed the nuclear order as it emerged in the 1960s as reflecting the political collusion and hegemony of the superpowers America and Russia. Once it normalized relations with Washington and was given a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Beijing dropped its rhetoric against the NPT and eventually joined the treaty in the early 1990s. Now China is a champion of nonproliferation! India began a similar journey in May 1998 when it conducted nuclear tests. Two previous foreign ministers representing different governments—Jaswant Singh of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) and Natwar Singh of the UPA—I—declared that India had no quarrel with the NPT. In identical statements made in May 2000 and April 2005, respectively, in connection with the NPT review conferences, the two ministers said, “India may not be a party to the NPT, but our conduct has always been consistent with the key provisions of the treaty as they apply to nuclear weapon states.”

Much has happened since then, including the successful negotiation of India’s global civil nuclear initiative and the consequent transformation of India’s nuclear status. India must now end its defensiveness on the NPT. It needs to articulate a clear vision about India’s role in the management of the global nuclear order and its three pillars: nonproliferation, disarmament, and the expanded use of civilian nuclear energy. Great powers have the burden of maintaining order in world politics even at the expense of equity and justice. As a rising power, India must demonstrate that it is ready to undertake that responsibility and sustain the “discriminatory” global nuclear order built around the NPT. India’s ability to do that will significantly expand if the United States can find a way to deal with the NPT obstacle that often comes in finding an accommodation between Delhi and the nonproliferation system.

The Proliferation Security Initiative

That the theology of NPT has often been allowed to come in the way of Indo-U.S. cooperation on nonproliferation is brought out most vividly in the case of the Proliferation Security Initiative. The Bush administration unveiled the PSI in 2003 as a cooperative mechanism to interdict illicit transfers of nuclear and other WMD materials between nations. The PSI plugs a major gap in the NPT system that prohibits such transfers but has no way of monitoring or enforcing that prohibition. The PSI is not a treaty but is an arrangement based on a set of broad principles. India, which has been affected by the clandestine nuclear trade between Pakistan and the advanced world as well as others like North Korea led by the A. Q. Khan network, had every
political incentive to join such a mechanism. Well before Bush announced the PSI in 2004, India had stopped and searched a North Korean ship carrying missile components in 1999. After the announcement of the civil nuclear initiative, there was expectation in Washington that India would join the PSI. Even before that, forward-looking sections of the Indian establishment were beginning to look at the PSI in a positive manner. In January 2005, the Indian defense minister, Pranab Mukherjee, said that the proliferation of WMD through the sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean was a big emerging problem and that initiatives like the PSI “must be examined in greater detail.” Although participation in the PSI was not written down in the July 18 declaration as part of India’s commitments to strengthen the NPT system, the establishment in Delhi was signaling its readiness to do so. Speaking in October 2005, the foreign secretary, Shyam Saran, emphasized the importance of India’s participation in the enforcement of global norms:

As a nuclear weapon state, our support for international norms is critical for their success. But it is not only in our controls and restraint that we can make a difference. The time when NPT was regarded as self-enforcing is long past….The challenge that the world currently faces requires more active endeavours….The Container Security Initiative and Proliferation Security Initiative are two such examples. Advocates of nonproliferation must seriously examine whether the support of India towards global efforts is to their advantage. That support is difficult to muster if India perceives itself as unfairly treated despite its demonstrated commitment to a rule-bound system.8

The Indian Navy, too, saw the PSI as an opportunity to expand the Indian role in promoting collective security in the Indian Ocean and has been happy to conduct joint naval exercises with the United States Navy that are devoted to search and seizure functions. Yet a range of factors, domestic and external, continued to limit the possibility of India joining the PSI.9

One important factor inhibiting the Indian participation in the PSI has been the question of NPT membership in a little-known international agreement, the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA Convention) adopted in 1988. In 2005, the United States mobilized the international community to add a protocol to the SUA Convention to include new offenses in relation to the transportation of WMD and related materials. The trade between countries that were parties to the NPT was naturally excluded from the provisions; the SUA Convention specifically prohibits transportation of WMD-type material

to countries that do not accept the comprehensive international safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).\textsuperscript{10} India is not a member of the NPT nor does it have full-scale safeguards on its nuclear program even after the civil nuclear initiative. For those in Delhi used to seeing demons in international treaties, the protocol became an important basis to question whether India’s accommodation with the nuclear system was real. Might India be a target under the PSI, even as it offers cooperation? In Washington, those who were not enthusiastic about the civil nuclear initiative were unwilling to skirt around the NPT question in relation to the PSI in order to accommodate Indian sensitivities.

If Delhi and Washington are determined to expand the areas of nonproliferation cooperation, they can and should be able to find a way out. One approach could be for India to offer in a formal setting an endorsement of the objectives of the NPT. Much like France in the 1970s, India could declare that it will act as if it were a nuclear weapon state party to the NPT. The United States in turn could give a formal commitment that India will not be a target of the PSI. The exact nature of the mutually satisfactory commitments is something one could leave for lawyers and diplomats.

**Export Controls**

Delhi’s assurances on the NPT could be one way of dealing with an even more pressing issue of the continuing restrictions on the export of high-technology items to India. Under the civil nuclear initiative, the United States helped India regain access to the global civilian nuclear market by changing the U.S. domestic law on nuclear proliferation and the rules on nuclear commerce of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). (Contrary to the widespread perception, it was not the NPT that prohibited civilian nuclear transfers to India.) This massive exercise, however, did not remove a range of other restrictions from U.S. national export controls on various technologies, dual-use items, and arms (the munitions list) and from the four multilateral export control arrangements—the Wassenaar arrangement on dual-use technology exports, the Australia group on chemical exports, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Ever since the NSG was set up in response to the Indian nuclear test in 1974, India had taken a strong exception to these groups and consistently denounced them as discriminatory. Paradoxically, at the same time India exercised significant restraint in exporting sensitive high-technology items. This strange dualism meant India would not get credit for supporting the collective goods on nonproliferation and would forever be penalized for being outside the system.

Beginning in the early 1990s, India began to review its export control policies. As it began to emphasize export-led economic growth and its industrial capabilities expanded, Delhi realized the need for a better framework for export controls than a politically determined bias against such

\textsuperscript{10} For a comprehensive discussion, see Craig H. Allen, *Maritime Counterproliferation Operations and the Rule of Law* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007).
exports.\textsuperscript{11} This acquired urgency after the May 1998 Pokharan-II nuclear tests, as the Indo-U.S. nuclear dialogue focused on export controls as one of the major benchmarks for the lifting of U.S. sanctions. When the Bush administration came to power it set up a High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) in 2002 to address the question of removing restrictions where possible and expanding the high-technology trade between the two countries. While much progress has been made since then, the problem has not gone away. Many leading Indian organizations like the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), and Bharat Dynamics remain on the so-called entities list of the United States.

Two Americans familiar with the negotiations between the two countries on export controls underline the case for a new approach:

Many in India consider the very fact that these organizations are on the Entity List as an affront. They argue that these organizations are not rogue outfits but integral parts of the Indian state apparatus, involved in legitimate activities that the US has agreed to support, including civil space, basic science, and civil nuclear activities. Both sides should now examine ways to draw clearer lines between these legitimate civilian activities and sensitive ballistic missile and nuclear activities. This would ease the removal of these organizations from the Entity List and enable closer strategic cooperation.\textsuperscript{12}

Other American analysts too have made the case for give-and-take and aligning the U.S. export controls with the proposition that Delhi is a strategic partner of Washington.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite bringing its own export control lists into increasing alignment with those of the multilateral export control groupings, India remains their target. The United States wants India to “adhere” to the multilateral export control lists without asking for any easing of the restrictions against it. On the eve of Prime Minister Singh’s visit to Washington during November 2009, there apparently was some discussion about coming to a new understanding. Singh himself saw removal of the restrictions on high-technology exports as a major objective of his visit. In an interview to Newsweek, he said:

My sincere hope is that we can persuade the U.S. administration to be more liberal when it comes to transfer of dual-use technologies to us. Now that we are strategic partners


these restrictions make no sense. India has an impeccable record of not participating in any proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. So, that is my number one concern.\footnote{Manmohan Singh interview with Lally Weymouth, Newsweek, November 16, 2009, available at http://www.pmindia.nic.in/int_Weymouth.htm.}

For reasons unknown there was no progress on the issue during the visit. Since then, India seemed to have raised the issue again during Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao’s visit to cochair the HTCG meeting in Washington. Rao publicly asked for the lifting of what she called “anachronistic export controls” against India.\footnote{Narayan Lakshman, “U.S. Export Control Restrictions ‘Anachronistic’ says Rao,” The Hindu, March 17, 2010, available at http://www.thehindu.com/2010/03/17/stories/2010031753161300.htm.} It is also understood that India has offered to join these multilateral groups as a full member and abide by their rules and lists on export controls.

This important Indian offer comes at a time when the Obama administration is itself examining the case for a comprehensive reform of its export control laws as part of its effort to boost U.S. exports to such dynamic markets as China and India.\footnote{The White House, “Fact Sheet on President’s Export Control Reform Initiative,” April 20, 2010, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/fact-sheet-presidents-export-control-reform-initiative.} Meanwhile India’s industrial base is rapidly expanding and so is its ability to export a range of advanced technology items. Therefore an agreement that lets India into the export control groupings and stops treating it as a target would be the logical next step to the civil nuclear initiative and a big step towards making India a full-fledged partner of the nonproliferation system. While such an understanding is apparently being explored, there are said to be a few problems. One of them apparently relates to the requirement that members of some of the export control groups are also to be parties to the NPT. This, however, need not necessarily be an insurmountable obstacle. France, for example, was a founding member of the NSG well before it joined the NPT. Because these export controls are not treaties, Washington should be able to find a way to bring India into them in return for Delhi’s commitment to abide by their rules.

**Enrichment and Reprocessing**

In the Bush–Singh joint declaration of July 18, 2005, India committed itself to not export enrichment and reprocessing technologies, thus supporting a new initiative in Washington to plug a perceived loophole in the NPT. Iran’s emphasis on the “right” to develop uranium enrichment at home had rightly underlined the importance of restricting the interpretation of Article IV of the NPT. That India was willing to support this new approach marked a significant evolution of India’s position on the “discriminatory” nature of the NPT and recognition of its own interest in preventing other states in the region from copying the Iranian model. India has also broadly endorsed the notion of international fuel banks that would address the concerns of countries for assured fuel supplies. Yet, there is some concern in India that Washington might
encourage the NSG to restrict the export of these technologies to India.\textsuperscript{17} India is quite advanced in the reprocessing sector and has a small enrichment facility. As it embarks on building a large civilian nuclear program, with a large initial emphasis on light water reactors, India would want to establish a large-scale commercial uranium enrichment facility.

Any restriction on the sale of uranium enrichment technology to India would be seen as a further shifting of the goal posts that were agreed to on July 18, 2005. During the negotiations Delhi had the understanding that while the United States itself would not sell enrichment and reprocessing technologies to India, it would not stand in the way of others from doing the same. The issue had come up during the visit of U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton to India in July 2009. While the secretary sought to reassure India, other official comment from Washington, D.C. was not suggesting that the Obama administration remain ambiguous.\textsuperscript{18} On India’s part, Prime Minister Singh affirmed that any such restriction would be seen as a violation of the “clean exemption” that India had gotten from the NSG in September 2008. He argued:

> It is our expectation that any future decisions of the Nuclear Suppliers Group relating to the transfer of enrichment and reprocessing items and technology would take into account the special status accorded to India by the NSG. The NSG has given us this clean exemption knowing full well that India is not a signatory to the NPT. Prohibition by the NSG of such transfers would require a consensus among all the 46 countries. That does not exist at present. The exemption given to India by the NSG provides for consultations and we will hence remain engaged with that body so that any decisions take into account the special status accorded to India by the global nuclear community.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{CTBT, FMCT, and Military Space}

As part of the broad understanding with the United States on July 18, 2005, Delhi had agreed to maintain its moratorium on nuclear tests and actively support the negotiations on a fissile materials cutoff treaty. Contrary to the recurrent fears in Washington that India might abandon these positive positions, it is possible to assert with reasonable confidence that India has no political or strategic incentive to rock the boat on nuclear testing. To be sure, there has been a


vigorous recent debate in India on the credibility of the hydrogen bomb test in 1998, which in turn has raised question about Delhi testing again or at least refraining from signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The disputation among the scientific community on the data from the hydrogen bomb test on May 11, 1998, does not, however, alter the proposition that any decision to test again will be a political one taken at the highest levels of the government. Consideration of the economic and political consequences of renewed testing is likely to far outweigh any possible pressures from a section of the scientific community. From the Indian perspective, the question of signing the CTBT will arise when the United States Senate ratifies the treaty and China follows suit. Similarly on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), too, it is the Sino-U.S. dynamic that appears far more consequential than the Indian position on the treaty negotiations.

On both the CTBT and the FMCT, the Chinese are affirming a strong linkage between the two treaties, which respectively seek to impose qualitative and quantitative limits on nuclear arsenals, and the implications of U.S. advances on missile defence. According to one Chinese expert, if the United States’ “space weaponization plans move forward and threaten the Chinese deterrence capability...it could make the Chinese ratification of [the CTBT] more difficult. Under those circumstances, China may feel the need to conduct additional nuclear tests and develop new warheads that include decoys or maneuverable warheads to counter any developments in U.S. missile defence capability.” Similarly, if concerns about U.S. space weapon capabilities grow, “China may go so far as to be unwilling to negotiate or join an FMCT under those circumstances. In other words, U.S. missile defence and space weapons plans will affect China’s willingness to participate in an FMCT negotiation.”

This raises the larger questions of the weaponization of space, a subject that does not figure at the top of the conversations between the United States and India on nuclear proliferation. The initial enthusiasm in Delhi and Washington for bilateral cooperation on missile defense has tended to wane amidst a range of factors. If the Congress party in India was not willing to follow through

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21 During the visit of Prime Minister Hatoyama of Japan to India in December 2009, Prime Minister Singh told him that the situation on the CTBT would change when the United States and China ratify the treaty. See the transcript of their joint press conference in New Delhi on December 29, 2009, available at http://www.mea.gov.in/pressrelease/2009/12/29pr03.htm.


23 Ibid., p. 149.

on the BJP party’s eagerness for missile defense, in Washington the Democrats are less enamored with missile defense. Yet space-related issues are steadily becoming more important in the strategic calculations of both Washington and Delhi. One specific impulse has been the impressive advance in China’s military space capabilities, its testing of anti-satellite weapons, and the evolution of the People’s Liberation Army’s space warfare doctrine. Meanwhile, India is beginning to make slow but independent advances in its military space program and has stepped up the testing of missile defense systems. As strategic partners, the United States and India must begin to address the various issues relating to weaponization in space and the importance of managing the space commons, amidst the unfolding Sino-U.S. competition as well as the broader proliferation of space capabilities.

Iran and the Gulf Balance

Iran’s drive to acquire nuclear weapons has emerged as a major international issue and has been at the top of the global nonproliferation agenda as well as the bilateral engagement between Washington and Delhi. India has voted with the United States against Iran three times during the last few years at the International Atomic Energy Agency at the risk of considerable domestic political criticism that it is abandoning its traditional friends in the Middle East. Yet, there is concern in the Obama administration that India might be tempted to return to its ambivalence about Iranian proliferation. Meanwhile there are many in New Delhi who are concerned about the growing U.S. reliance on Pakistan and who argue the case for reviving links with Iran to balance the possible dominance of Islamabad in Afghanistan. Although the interests of the United States and India do converge on preventing Iranian proliferation, there could be genuine differences between the two on how best to achieve that goal and in dealing with the possible consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran. Washington needs to consult India far more on the specifics and timing of its moves towards Iran rather than merely present India with a fait accompli. Delhi sees that Moscow and Beijing get incentives for their limited and grudging support for U.S. steps against Iran, while India must simply comply. The fact remains that while India has curtailed much of its energy engagement with Iran, Beijing has pursued far more expansive cooperation with Tehran in the hydrocarbon sector without any fear of American sanctions. India and the United States must also find ways to work together to deal with Iranian proliferation within the larger context of regional security in the Middle East and especially the growing concerns of the Arab Gulf. The Arab proposal for a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East could offer one vehicle for Indo-U.S. cooperation.

At the NPT review conference in May 2010, the idea of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East gained some traction. Although Washington was upset with the naming of Israel in the final

resolution of the conference, it is not opposed to the idea itself. India, which has cautiously backed the idea for some time, should be able to join the United States in preventing a dangerous new nuclear arms race in the volatile Middle East. Unlike Islamabad, whose clandestine nuclear networks have actively spread WMD capabilities in the Middle East, Delhi has many reasons to promote stability in a region that is the world’s energy heartland and is an important part of India’s extended neighborhood. Given India’s own extraordinary stakes in deepening partnership with the Arab nations, Delhi has every incentive to back their case for a Middle East nuclear weapon-free zone and implicitly support their quest for a balance vis-à-vis Iran. Not surprisingly, the first hints of Indian support for such a zone came when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in February 2010. In the Riyadh declaration issued at the end of that visit, Premier Singh and King Abdullah underlined the “importance of regional and international efforts focusing on making the Middle East and Gulf region free of all nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction.”

This is an important shift away from the previous Indian impulse to back off from all proposals for regional nuclear-free zones. It will take much effort, however, to realize the Middle East free zone, the idea of which dates back to 1974, when Egypt and Iran first proposed it in the UN General Assembly. Since the 1980s, Israel has been part of the consensus that supports the free zone concept. While all the countries in the region back the idea, there are huge differences among the major players on the sequence, timing, and, above all, the relationship between peace and disarmament. This does not mean nuclear confidence-building measures cannot be conceived and promoted in the Middle East as part of a comprehensive peace process. Working with the United States to find a way towards a nuclear weapon-free Middle East is a worthy and challenging enterprise for India, which must learn to accept larger responsibilities in stabilizing the Middle East. This must necessarily involve strengthening security cooperation with the smaller Gulf states and working with the United States and others to prevent a destabilizing shift in the regional balance in favor of Iran. Such an approach will require more intensive consultations between Delhi and Washington on the Middle East as a whole. It must also mean approaching the security question in a comprehensive manner rather than the nuclear question alone.

Conclusion

India’s arms control and nonproliferation policies have evolved in a positive direction since it declared itself a nuclear weapon power in 1998. The historic civil nuclear initiative concluded during 2005–2008 has accelerated the pace of that evolution. Further progress is indeed at hand if Delhi and Washington agree to see cooperation on nonproliferation as part of a larger enterprise to build an enduring bilateral strategic partnership. Equally important, Delhi and Washington need to maintain the kind of mutual trust that was developed during the negotiations on the civil

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nuclear initiative and sustain the political will to readjust much of their traditional arms control orientation. So long as Delhi and Washington recognize the historic redistribution of power under way in Asia and beyond, and acknowledge that arms control must be an integral part of managing this structural change, they should not find it difficult to arrive at the necessary compromises to simultaneously strengthen the nonproliferation regime and complete India’s accommodation with it.
India and the Nonproliferation Institutions
Addressing the “Expectations Gap”

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