



South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal

Book Reviews

Manpreet Sethi

P.R. Chari (ed.), *Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Seeking Synergy in Bilateralism*

Warning

The contents of this site is subject to the French law on intellectual property and is the exclusive property of the publisher.

The works on this site can be accessed and reproduced on paper or digital media, provided that they are strictly used for personal, scientific or educational purposes excluding any commercial exploitation. Reproduction must necessarily mention the editor, the journal name, the author and the document reference.

Any other reproduction is strictly forbidden without permission of the publisher, except in cases provided by legislation in force in France.

revues.org

Revues.org is a platform for journals in the humanites and social sciences run by the CLEO, Centre for open electronic publishing (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

Electronic reference

Manpreet Sethi, « P.R. Chari (ed.), *Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Seeking Synergy in Bilateralism* », *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Online], Book Reviews, Online since 21 January 2010, connection on 08 November 2012. URL : <http://samaj.revues.org/2913>

Publisher: Association pour la Recherche sur l'Asie du Sud

<http://samaj.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document available online on: <http://samaj.revues.org/2913>

This document is a facsimile of the print edition.

© samaj



Sethi, Manpreet (2010) 'P.R. Chari (ed.), *Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Seeking Synergy in Bilateralism*', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, URL: <http://samaj.revues.org/index2913.html>. To quote a passage, use paragraph (§).

**P.R. Chari (ed.), *Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Seeking Synergy in Bilateralism*,
New Delhi: Routledge, 326 pages, ISBN 978-0-415-54452-8.**

Manpreet Sethi

[1] Rarely in the history of independent India has any issue of foreign policy attracted as much attention, called for such investment of political and intellectual energies, and divided the polity as fractiously as the Indo-US civilian nuclear cooperation agreement did between 2005 and 2008.¹ Of course, some of this was expected given the unprecedented nature of the bilateral relationship being forged after a long period of estrangement. It is well known that Indo-US nuclear relations had been strained over the American insistence that India's strategic programme follow the mantra of "cap, roll and eliminate", and that its civilian nuclear programme open itself up to full scope safeguards in order to qualify for nuclear cooperation.

[2] Desirous of a rapid growth in domestic nuclear generation capacity through international cooperation, India was nevertheless intransigent over accepting full-scope safeguards over its indigenous programme. From 2002-03 onwards, therefore, India had argued for a special waiver from the NSG guidelines given its large energy needs, the desire to meet them in an environmentally sustainable manner, its expertise in nuclear energy generation, and its non proliferation credentials. A fortuitous set of circumstances created the possibility of such cooperation in 2005, and some ingenious and persistent negotiations driven by the top leadership in USA and India finally reached culmination in September 2008.

[3] The many twists and turns during the stormy negotiations make for an interesting story and this book from Routledge is among the early ones off the mark after the conclusion of the deal. Of course, during the three years of negotiations, there were umpteen analytical articles

¹ A slightly different version of this review first appeared in the Book Review section of the website of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

and journalistic pieces. The print and electronic media in India and the US gave ample coverage to every aspect of the agreement. But this is the first full-length book that recounts the entire process leading up to the conclusion of the landmark agreement. It is also holistic in its approach, bringing together the domestic and international, pro- and anti-agreement, and technical and political perspectives. The book also performs great service to future analysts by putting together several important documents as Appendices. Finding relevant primary source material in one place would ease the task for many, as would the two sections on thematic comparison of legislations.

[4] Amongst the many strengths of the book is the fact, as explained by the Editor, P.R. Chari, that it contains articles written by a blend of young and old, experienced analysts and new interns, as well as academics and practitioners. This mix provides fresh insights into the many facets of the Indo-US nuclear deal. For instance, the chapter on Tarapur by Eric Gonsalves, a seasoned Indian diplomat, adequately recounts the experience of the first Indo-US nuclear engagement and explains why it cast such a negative shadow on the current deal. Drawing a lesson from the past he wisely concludes, 'the best way to compromise a dispute is to reach an honourable agreement using diplomacy' and this will have to be followed in the future too since there will always be differences, even in a 'strategic relationship', since countries obviously follow their national interest. In fact, more of this will be required as India engages with an emerging multi-polar system.

[5] Yet another notable contribution to the volume is that by Vidya Shankar Aiyar who has traced the role of media during the negotiation of the agreement. The very inclusion of a chapter on this subject illustrates the importance of electronic media in current times as a potent influence on public opinion. Certainly, given the technical issues involved, the many steps that the agreement had to go through, and the diverse interpretations it was subjected to, made a coherent coverage of the deal not an easy task. Neither was information from official sources easy to come by. This often led to speculation that might have done more harm than good in specific instances. Lessons must be drawn from this for the future since the media will remain an important player in national security. It must understand its own responsibilities and exploit its strengths intelligently in the interest of the nation.

[6] Another interesting dimension of the deal is brought out by David Temple in his chapter on the role of lobbyists in US congress. For India, the conclusion of this agreement was the first real experience of sorts on the critical role lobbies and pressure groups not affiliated with the administration play in the US in swinging a case. Going by the facts presented in the essay, India did learn to make good use of this tool. However, it is ironical that members of the legislature in both countries had a common complaint in that the authorities on the other side seemed to know more about the proposals being negotiated than parliaments within the country. There is also a lesson to be drawn from the US system of Congressional hearings where top government officials testify on an issue and thus contribute to informed decision making.

[7] The chapter contributed by Dhruva Jaishankar lays out Washington's perspective on the long-drawn and complex negotiations given the many techno-legal issues involved. Having been a part of the Indian negotiating team, he is able to comment on the process from the inside and provides many insights into the US interest in enabling India to participate in international nuclear commerce.

[8] R. Rajaraman's article that highlights the linkage between the energy and military dimensions of India's nuclear effort too stands out for its balanced and comprehensive handling of technical and strategic issues. Another technical issue is covered by Ashwin Kumar in his assessment of the technical challenges facing India's fast breeder reactors. Recounting the experience of some other nations on FBRs, he is pessimistic of Indian success. However, he fails to adequately explain the compulsions of India in following this route, its advantages in terms of long-term energy security, and the achievements of the Indian nuclear enterprise. While safety concerns deserve top most priority, the addition of the above dimensions would have made the article more balanced.

[9] Meanwhile, the potential of the deal is already being realized just one year after its conclusion. By the end of 2009, India had already concluded nuclear cooperation agreements or Memorandum of Understanding with eight countries, which included the major nuclear powers such as Russia, France, USA, Canada, and Kazakhstan. Negotiations with the US were underway on the issue of securing the right to reprocess imported fuel as well as over the possibility of import of technology for reprocessing. The nuclear liability legislation that India was required to legislate in order to facilitate private American nuclear companies to build reactors

was also near completion. Meanwhile, the arrival of nuclear fuel was restoring the lost capacities of the operating nuclear power plants.

[10] However, the challenges that India will face as the nuclear horizons open up will be many. As the domestic programme moves into fast track expansion, shortage of skilled manpower, technical expertise to take informed decisions on choice of reactors, the ability of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board to quickly, yet with the utmost regard for safety, tackle issues of clearances for new plant designs, plant siting, rehabilitation plans etc will have to be dealt with. In fact, a chapter in the book detailing these and other challenges that the Indian nuclear establishment and industry is likely to face would have gone a long way in preparing the country to handle these in the times ahead.

[11] This one lacuna notwithstanding, on the whole, the book makes for interesting reading of the story of the conclusion of the Indo-US nuclear deal. The final essay by the editor sounds a note of caution on how the future could unfurl. While conceding the criticality of the deal, he however opines that it could not be the 'touchstone' on which the relationship could be founded. It would be certainly naïve to anchor inter-state relations on one issue. Yet, there is no doubt that the ground covered during the negotiation of the Indo-US nuclear deal would stand the two countries in good stead as they interact on bilateral, regional or international issues of common concern in the future.