

123 AGREEMENT ANOTHER FORM OF NPT

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The present national debate generated by the 123 Indo-US Nuclear Deal has, apparently, gone haywire. With politics in full play the debate would appear to have boiled down to one between pro and anti US lobbies, degenerating into a slanging match between political parties over non issues ranging from claims of the Agreement being India's most important diplomatic achievement to charges of a sell out on the question of the country's sovereignty – with aspersions being cast on the patriotism of parties and individuals in good measure. The real issues seem to be ignored or conveniently side tracked.

The economic benefits that will accrue to India as result of this Agreement can hardly be disputed and there is no point in harping on this issue any more than has already been done. For a sustained economic growth, India would, indeed, require to build-up an additional power generating capacity of about 600,000 MW over the next 20 years. With our present power generating capacity no more than 140,000 MW, and given our performance in the field over the past half a century, raising this capacity more than four fold in the next 20 years through additional coal and hydro-electric power projects alone, would, no doubt, prove to be a rather tall order. India seeking to acquire modern nuclear technology for raising its power generating capacity is, therefore, understandable. The question, however, is at what cost? The reference here is not to the economic viability of nuclear power generation vis-à-vis coal and hydro-electric power generation. This could best be left to be worked out by Indian economic experts and who could be better at an exercise on cost effectiveness than the Prime Minister, Dr Man Mohan Singh, himself. It would be a matter of worry and debate only if it is going to be at the cost of national security. Here again no aspersions are intended to cast on any body's integrity or patriotism. It is only that all through the post Independence period, starting with Nehru, most Indian intellectuals have tended to be more idealistic than pragmatic in their convictions related to national defence. Apparently in the 'butter verses guns' controversy the 'butter' has always weighed more heavily with them than the 'guns'. 'Butter' is no doubt all important but 'guns' are also necessary to be able to eat the 'butter' with honour, dignity and, most of all, security.

The aspect of national security involved would not be discernable to any one going through the text of the 123 Agreement. For this one would need to read the 'finer print' or 'between the lines' as they say. One would thus find that the hidden hand of the Hyde's Act takes away all that the open hand in the Agreement grants. While Agreement explicitly says that it does not impinge upon India's military strategic programme, the Hyde's Act, by which the US Government is bound, enjoins it to nullify the Agreement and take punitive action against India in the form of 'right of return', were it to embark upon such a programme. It would be rather naïve on our part to think that, in the event of the US withdrawing, some of the countries of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), antagonistic of the US, might continue their nuclear supplies to India as a matter of self interest – economic or strategic. If the NSG was not to function as a composite entity, governed by a single code of conduct, where was the need to form such a Group? Or for that matter where would there have been the need to have the Indo-US Agreement ratified by the NSG.

The fact of the matter is that with the implied restrictions on India embarking upon any military strategic programme, the 123 Indo-US nuclear deal would appear to be very much like the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which India has been resisting for the last four decades

or so. If India had all this while found the NPT to be against its national security interests so would be the Indo-US nuclear deal which performs a role similar to that of the NPT. The threat perspective to the country has not changed since the inception of the NPT. It may not be diplomatic to say so but the nuclear power China, with its conflicting policy objectives vis-à-vis India, continues to be India's potential enemy number one. The permanency of the threat from China is evident from the fact that it continues to treat large portions of Indian territory, (including the whole of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, and portions of West Bengal), as part its "lost territories", regaining of which forms part of its declared foreign policy objectives.

The nuclear threat to our country from China is, therefore, very much real and needs to be attended too urgently. The threat from the Chinese strategic nuclear weapons could be met by developing a deterrent in the form of a credible second strike capability in retaliation to China's first strike. The very thought of destruction that would be caused by a single strategic nuclear war-head would be so dreadful that no country would risk receiving one on itself even if it possessed the capability of landing many more on its opponent. But the Chinese threat from its tactical nuclear weapons would be a different cup of tea. There was a time when it was universally accepted, (under the nuclear fire-break theory), that any use of tactical nuclear weapons would inevitably escalate into a large scale thermonuclear war. However, with the advancement in the nuclear tactical weapons technology, which has helped in developing "clean", (guaranteed free of residual contamination and nuclear debris), tactical weapons of yields as low as the fraction of a kilo ton and suitable for targeting against a platoon (about 30 men) of the infantry, there has been much rethinking on this aspect of nuclear warfare. For China tactical nuclear weapons have a special utility against India. The terrain, over which it would be required to fight with India, is ideally suited for the use of such weapons. The likely battle zones in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh region are under-developed and sparsely populated, affording opportunities for dealing with military targets in isolation and without giving cause for protest to the rest of the world. There is no reason why China would not use these weapons when India does not possess a retaliatory capability. Tactical nuclear weapons being very much 'useable', the requirement for India in this regard is not merely that of developing a deterrent as in the case of nuclear strategic weapons. In this case India would need to match weapon for weapon with China.

The present state of India's development in the field of nuclear weapons – both strategic as well as tactical – could be termed only as basic and still very far from enough to counter the nuclear threat from China. India must, therefore, continue with its military nuclear programme much further to be able to stand up to China as a matter of its survival. The Indo-US nuclear deal must be viewed in this light and this light alone – all the other economic benefits that may accrue from it notwithstanding.