

Remarks of Dr. Stephen P. Cohen  
At the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Panel Discussion  
On the U.S.-India Nuclear Cooperative Initiative  
Wednesday, April 26, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my knowledge of South Asian security, non-proliferation and arms control issues as you grapple with this important initiative. On balance, the initiative should be welcomed. I have argued in print for a non-proliferation half-way house since 1990—an admittedly imperfect response to an imperfect situation, but far better than the status quo. By minor modifications in the proposed legislation and changes in American policy the nuclear cooperation agreement could be still further improved.

I am a signatory of a March 10 letter backing the initiative. That letter argues that the agreement enhances American *strategic* interests, and if properly implemented, it will advance, not retard, American *non-proliferation* objectives. We also argue that the initiative will help India move to an *energy* strategy that makes it less dependant on imported oil and that it will positively address our global *environmental* concerns.

I was resident in India during many of the major Indian debates over its nuclear weapons policy. In 1964-65 it debated its response to the Chinese nuclear test at Lop Nor; in 1967-68 it debated whether or not to sign the NPT, and in 1974, after its phony “peaceful nuclear explosion,” India debated whether to weaponize. In the late 1980s there was a major debate over the proper response to evidence of a Chinese-assisted Pakistani nuclear weapons program. The Rajiv Gandhi “Action Plan” of 1988 was in part a last-minute attempt to forestall a response-in-kind to Pakistan’s program; in the early 1990s Indians grappled with the highly publicized American effort to cap, roll back, and eliminate its nuclear weapons program and that of Pakistan. More recently, I spent a month in New Delhi observing the Indian debate over the Bush-Manmohan Singh initiative.

There are two major conclusions to draw from this forty-year history:

First, in most of these cases India was responding to nuclear developments elsewhere. It’s strategic elite was sharply divide as to the utility and morality of nuclear weapons, and until the 1998 tests India’s policy was one of maintaining an “option” or a “recessed” (i.e. unannounced) deterrent. As opponents of this agreement have noted, India simply lied about its small weapons program and it certainly violated the spirit and the letter of agreements reached with foreign governments concerning the peaceful use of nuclear assistance. For that India has been subjected to thirty years’ of sanctions.

Second, in all of these debates the military, and purely military calculations, have been notably absent. The Indian nuclear program was nurtured by a small enclave of scientists and bureaucrats who were largely responsive, not pro-active in their thinking. As George Tanham wrote, Indian strategic thought is notable by its lack of interest in military things. There was and remains a curious blend of extravagant idealism (epitomized in the many

plans for global nuclear disarmament generated in India over the years) and Kautilyan-Machiavellian realism (epitomized by the secrecy that shrouded the covert weapons program).

It is my judgment that this initiative need not trigger an arms race with Pakistan, and it is certainly not a green light to India to build a thousand or more nuclear weapons. It does provide the United States with an opportunity to work with India to help prevent a broader nuclear arms race, something that is certainly not in the interest of India, Pakistan, China, or America.

Therefore, I would propose the following steps:

First, The agreement with India should eventually be folded into legislation that would develop criteria that would allow other states to enter such a nuclear half-way house. This half-way house would provide civilian nuclear assistance in exchange for impeccable *horizontal* non-proliferation record. Right now India seems to meet most reasonable tests, as does Israel, but Pakistan and North Korea would not.

Second, the administration should undertake an initiative that would constrain *vertical* proliferation via a nuclear restraint regime in Asia, this initiative would include India, Pakistan and China. Such a regime need not involve formal, negotiated limits, which would be very difficult to achieve, but certainly could be based upon a fissile material cutoff, continued restraint on testing, and limited deployment of weapons. The first two feature in the US-India nuclear initiative, but they need to be made multilateral, especially to ward off an arms race between Pakistan and India. Of course, China's decision on renewing testing will be shaped by its response to the United States, and I believe that we can continue our own ban on tests indefinitely without damaging nuclear preparedness.

Third, with this agreement in place New Delhi should feel less paranoid about discussing its own nuclear capabilities and their interaction with those of other states. As long as India felt that the US was trying to strip it of its weapons program Indian officials talked on endlessly about global nuclear disarmament, but they refused to discuss concrete steps that would enhance India's security through cooperative agreements with others. Indeed, the Indians are still reluctant to allow their country to be the venue for such discussions by non-government organizations, unless they are strictly scripted. Under the auspices of the new Indo-US Agreement on Science and Technology the US should assist India in setting up a center to study "best practices" gleaned from the American and Russian/Soviet nuclear and missile experience. We should also expect that India will eventually join the process of nuclear arms reduction that began with U.S. and Russian nuclear cuts; I am disappointed that such a long-term goal was not even mentioned in the various US-Indian communiqués, we do not want to continue down the process of arms reduction only to see some of the new nuclear weapons states such as India and Pakistan pass us on their way up.

To summarize, while supporting the agreement I believe that it should be the initial step in a process of crafting a diplomacy that addresses wider complex arms control and security concerns, not just meeting India's energy needs. America has such concerns in an area that stretches from Israel to China; this includes at least five states that have nuclear weapons and two that may be trying to acquire them. This agreement does much to repair the torn US-Indian strategic tie, it is important in reshaping and revitalizing India's massive energy shortfall, and it has already been helpful in our attempt to constrain an Iranian program, but this administration and its successor—with Congress' assistance—should regard it as a beginning, not an end as far as our nonproliferation and strategic interests are concerned.