

SELIG HARRISON'S MODEL & INDIA'S NUCLEAR POSTURE

Will it serve India's interests?

By ARVIND KUMAR

IN recent months, an interesting study on India's nuclear posture has been conducted by Mr Selig S Harrison, currently with the Woodrow Wilson Centre in Washington. It has given fresh impetus to the ongoing nuclear debate and highlighted the prospects of a US-South Asia nuclear 'trade-off' in general and US-India nuclear 'bargain' in particular. How far this study will influence key policy-makers in the US vis-a-vis India is a question that needs to be addressed.

Five components

Unlike many Americans, Mr Harrison in his study links insistence on nuclear restraint in South Asia with a demand for steps towards global nuclear disarmament. His postulates on a US nuclear 'bargain' with India have five components. First, India should test and accede to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and comply with the key clauses made in the treaty.

This, however, may not be acceptable to India and the US will also find it difficult to pursue and maintain closer co-operation. The Indian establishment knows very well that US law mandates sanctions if India tests a nuclear device. All aid to India would cease, the American representative in the World Bank and IMF may vote against any loans to India, no American bank would be allowed to lend to India and technology flows to India would be tightened severely. This would prove to be a political and economic disaster triggering a run on the rupee. Even if India tests a device, it may not accede to the CTBT in its present form because not even one nuclear warhead would be abolished under this treaty. There is also a feeling in India that if India signs the CTBT, its security will be endangered. India's security threat comes from nuclear China and the Sino-Pakistani nuclear collaboration. This is the reason why India wants to keep its nuclear options open.

Secondly, Mr Harrison suggests that India should accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, currently limited to Tarapur, to all nuclear-power reactors and also sign the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). This in India's point of view is also unacceptable. India is of the view that despite technology denials and existing export controls like those contained in the Zangger Committee guidelines, London Suppliers Guidelines (later expanded to the Nuclear Suppliers Group), the Missile Technology Control Regime and several other non-proliferation arrangements, India was able to progress in the field of nuclear power and built several indigenous reactors (like MAPS at Kalpakkam, Narora in UP and Kakrapar in Gujarat. Rawatbhata III and IV in Rajasthan are under construction and Kaiga I and II are under construction at Karnataka).

IAEA safeguards

India may not be amenable to IAEA safeguards on anything that has been indigenously constructed. Reliable sources, however, confirm that if India receives new plants and new technologies it would accept IAEA safeguards. With regard to the FMCT, the scope of the treaty till date (whether the treaty is retrospective or prospective) has not been defined. Hence, India for the time being, instead of pronouncing that it will not sign, should adopt a wait-and-watch policy.

India should also not forget that it co-sponsored the FMCT resolution with 30 other countries. The resolution was passed unanimously by the United Nation's General Assembly in December 1993. India should also be aware that stringent high-tech export curbs are going to remain a reality for the foreseeable future.

Thirdly, it was suggested by Mr

Harrison that India should not export nuclear technology and a commitment should be made by legislation. The question here is why the US is seemingly so intimidated by India's technological development.

Export policy

It is a well-known fact that upto now India has not exported nuclear technology at any level. Today, without being a member of the NSG, MTCR or the Australia Group, India, through its export policy, is honouring the guidelines of these multilateral technology control arrangements. India does not appear to have any plan in the near future to export nuclear technology. Hence, this suggestion of Mr Harrison's is in conformity with India's policies.

Instead of asking India not to export nuclear technology, the US should persuade India to formally join NSG, MTCR or any other non-proliferation regime (as a full member of these groups) by offering as an incentive a number of dual-use export licensing benefits. Such benefits could include General Cocom Trade (GCT), General Co-operating Governments (GCG) and General Free World (GFW) general licences, a liberalised distribution licence and expedited export-licence processing facilities.

Under a GCT general licence, India would have access to most items on the commerce commodity control list of the Department of Commerce. A GCG general licence would allow it to buy without Department of Commerce approval items controlled for national security reasons, except for supercomputers.

India may be willing to co-operate with multilateral control regimes, even though they have consistently targeted India, if it sees no conflict with its national security interests.

The next component of Mr

Harrison's model is interesting. It says that if India accepts all the three proposals explained earlier, then the US in return could abandon the "rollback" objective and lift the ban on nuclear reactor sales to India. This can never happen because India currently is not going to abide by the dictates of any nuclear weapon power. India cannot accept full-scope safeguards until and unless the nuclear powers also accept them.

In Mr Harrison's fifth and last postulate, it is suggested that Washington lead the nuclear states in making deep cuts in nuclear arsenals. The proposal envisages that India absorb up to US \$50 billion in foreign nuclear reactor supplies. This would prove beneficial for the commercially languishing US nuclear industry and India would give the US significant weightage in one of the most sensitive sectors of the Indian economy.

It has to be recognised that till date no attempt has been made in India to develop an integrated strategy to accelerate India's economic development by using international economic and technological resources, particularly those of the US. The time is ripe for India to exploit its potential.

Flawed proposal

There is, however, nothing new in the model. Both the US and India need clear thinking on their nuclear strategies. The proposal is severely flawed. Mr Harrison has not anywhere addressed the real factors underlying India's nuclear pursuit. India's genuine security considerations have not been highlighted. What India needs now is greater confidence in its own ability to deal with the outside world, especially the nuclear powers. It is India's sovereign right to reject an international agreement which is not in its national interest.

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