

## **New policy is foreign**

### **Between The Lines / Kuldip Nayar**

I have full faith in the integrity of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His views on the Indo-US nuclear deal reflect what he believes. He honestly feels that the deal is the best thing that has happened to India and if not pursued, the country will "miss the bus." He reminds me of the American scientists who were all for the atom bomb when it was built, but later regretted pushing the world towards death and devastation. The reason why I have given this example is because of the belief that Manmohan Singh may one day regret that the price he paid in the field of foreign affairs for negotiating the nuclear deal was inordinately high.

The sequence of events has made things worse: One, our economic policies, in the name of globalisation, have helped the multinationals; two, the controversial deal has polarised the country. Consequently, the impression that has gone around is that Manmohan Singh has joined hands with the United States.

I do not think that the uproar over restrictions on conducting nuclear tests is that justified. When the government under the then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee promised unilaterally that there would not be any "first use" of the bomb, it made a moral commitment. That should have been the end of the debate. I am also not unnecessarily worried about the absence of guarantees about uninterrupted fuel supplies. Indian scientists are resourceful enough to find a way out if Washington ever stops supplying fuel all of a sudden without consulting New Delhi. After all, the Tarapur plant has been running even after the US stopped supplying fuel some years ago.

My point of concern is that the deal has put a question mark on our independent foreign policy. Since winning freedom in 1947, India has been traversing a particular path which Jawaharlal Nehru had paved for us: maintaining an equal distance from two ideologically-opposed worldviews. His philosophy of nonalignment steered us through World War II's debris. He not only kept us away from any involvement but also provided a safe platform by the name of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to small and weak countries which did not want to be crushed in the fight between the two blocs. It was Nehru or, for that matter, India which helped save the world from the Cold War becoming hot.

With such credentials, how can we even think of tilting towards the US, if going to its camp is too strong a phrase to use? The NDA government's foreign policy under Vajpayee was wishy-washy except for the initiative he took when he took a bus to Pakistan. As regards America, BJP foreign minister Jaswant Singh had unending rounds of talks with top US officials, particularly Strobe Talbott and probably sowed the seeds of the nuclear deal. Still, the NDA did not send Indian soldiers to Iraq despite pressures put by President George W. Bush. The policy of nonalignment stayed more or less on course.

The Manmohan Singh government has broken the consensus. During his regime, India has been found to be too close to the US for comfort. This has alarmed our neighbouring countries as well. The perception has grown that India is already in the American camp. When I was recently in Pakistan, even the liberals chided me for having aligned with the US. They said, "We had no option, but you were in a position to stand up to Washington." I sensed the same impression among Bangladesh's leading intellectuals and journalists attending an India-Bangladesh colloquium in Delhi recently.

In contrast, Nehru's attitude was different. Even before Partition he convened a meeting of Asian countries in New Delhi. He was then the Prime Minister of the interim government. He said in 1947, on March 23 — in 1940, it was on this day that the Pakistan Resolution was passed — that, "For too long we

of Asia have been petitioners in western courts and chancelleries. That story must now belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own feet and to cooperate with all others who are prepared to cooperate with us. We do not intend to be the playthings of others." Does the nuclear deal with the US underline that message?

I maintain that no American law, including the Hyde Act, can affect our sovereignty if we remain firm. Unfortunately, when I read the fine print of the Hyde Act, I feel that we have been compromised. In the second paragraph itself, the Act says that India must have a foreign policy that is "congruent to that of the United States..." The word congruent means "in harmony," "agreeable." How can we accept this formulation when we know how the Bush administration has trampled upon the rights of the countries which it has found in its way?

On Iran, the Hyde Act assumes "India's full and active participation in United States' efforts to dissuade, isolate and, if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction..." We too do not want one more country to get the bomb in our neighbourhood. But why should we allow the US to dictate terms to us? American relations with Iran are going from bad to worse. Bush has authorised his commanders to confront Iran's "murderous activities."

The phrase "weapons of mass destruction" is all too familiar. Washington used it to hoodwink world opinion. It knew beforehand that Iraq had no such weapons. This was the pretext that the Bush administration used to get rid of President Saddam Hussein and control Iraq's oil fields. Thousands of Iraqis were killed during the war and many more thousands have died in the post-war efforts to bring a semblance of "order" in Iraq. The US has used the same phrase "weapons of mass destruction" for Iran in the Hyde Act which we have accepted. Foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee's statement that Iran has every right to pursue peaceful nuclear activity is only meant to allay an irritated Indian opinion. As of today, New Delhi will have to fall in line if and when the US attacks Iran.

I wish the Prime Minister would realise that India has to play its earlier role of staying independent and nonaligned. A lonely path is forlorn but separate. The advantage is that it is considered different. Gradually, nations come to respect an independent position. This was how our prestige skyrocketed even when India's growth rate was nowhere near nine per cent.

Nuclear energy is not a big deal. We can get all the energy we want from other sources, water, coal, wind, etc., by spending far less than the \$150 billion earmarked for nuclear energy installations. These will be less hazardous and the price per unit will be half the cost of nuclear energy. The biggest advantage is that unlike in the case of the India-US nuclear deal, the US will not be keeping a constant eye on us.