



**Center for Global & Strategic Studies**

**Implications of the Indo-US Growing Nuclear Nexus  
on the Regional Geopolitics**

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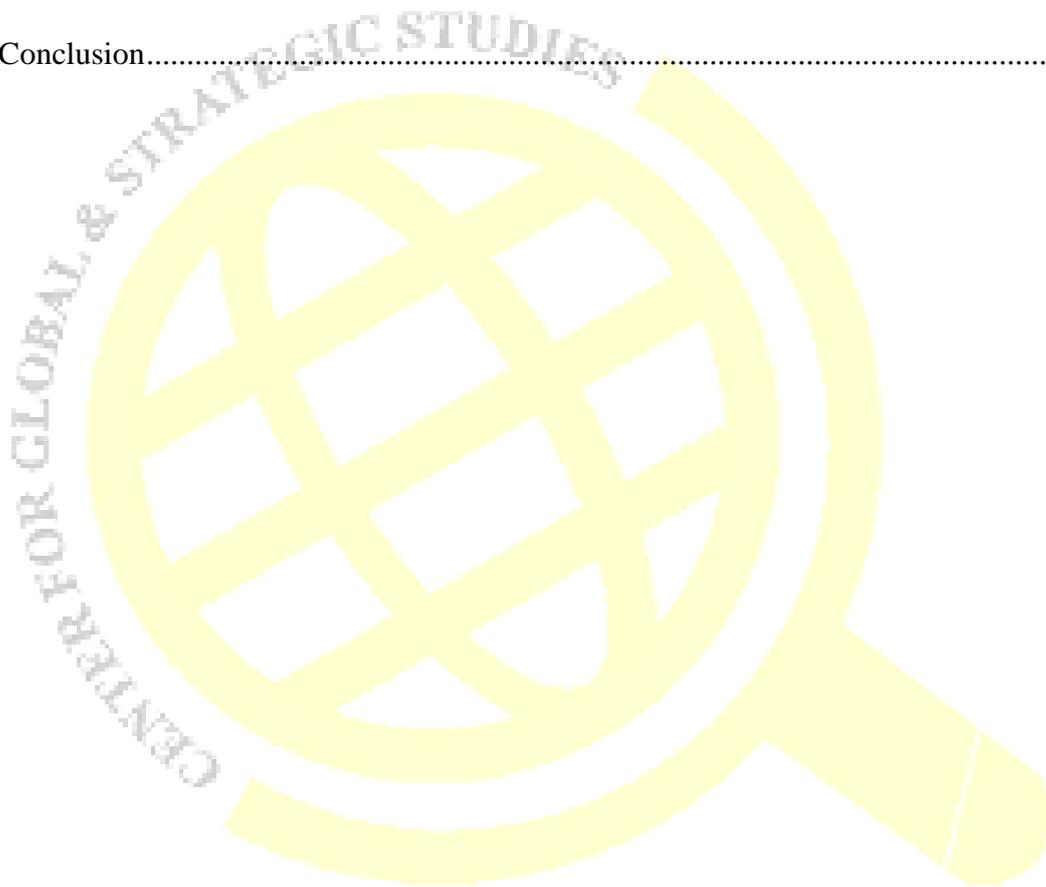
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## **Abstract**

The growing nuclear nexus between India and the United States has grave consequences on the regional politics of South Asia and the geopolitics of the greater region. Initiated more than a decade ago, it has drawn both signatories of the agreement closer and has played a significant role in the strengthening of already firm Sino-Pak bilateral ties. Even though the agreement was signed in the name of a Civilian Nuclear Agreement, it has a darker side to it. The deal has also violated the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the NPT regime has reservations regarding the deal. The deal also faced a substantial amount of criticism and opposition from inside India by many political and social platforms. The deal is an American way of countering the threat of rising China by empowering India and is an attempt to elevate the status of India. The risk perception mechanics of the United States about China are also under a question due to this agreement and what has followed it in the last decade. China aims for a peaceful economic rise and empowering the power hungry, war mongering state of India to counter China in the region is a gamble made by the Bush Administration which has serious repercussions for the region and the world. Moreover, the agreement has also opened new horizons for the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Russia.

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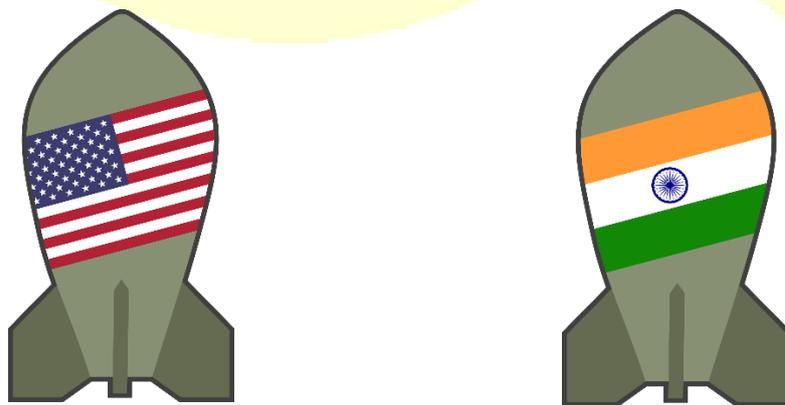
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## Introduction

The historical background of the agreement is rich and has a long chain of events that allow the two countries for the formation of this nexus. Even though India claimed itself to be the leader of the non-alignment movement, United States felt that this important South Asian country is tilting towards Russia as the major part of India's weaponry was purchased from the former Soviet Union and later from Russia. The defense ties between India and Russia have always been stronger, and this made the US devise policies towards Pakistan so to keep a balance of power in the region. The United States continued to support Pakistan throughout the cold-war era, and the advanced U.S. F-86 Sabre fighter jet was one of the many examples of American support towards Pakistan. The Jets did give Pakistan an edge over the Indian Air Force in the historic air combat of 1965.<sup>1</sup>

However, it all begin to change with the rise of China and the natural alliance between Pakistan and China. Despite the communist background of the Chinese, Pakistan continued to support the People's Republic at all diplomatic levels. Pakistan served as a bridge between China and the Muslim World throughout the course of the bilateral history. In 1972, Pakistan played a significant role in facilitating the revival of bilateral relations between China and the United States by bringing the two countries closer and facilitating the arrangements of then US President Nixon's visit to Beijing.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Hussain, J. Air Cdre. Retd. (2002). Excellence in Air Combat: PAF's Forte. Pakistan Defence Journal. <http://www.defencejournal.com/2002/april/combat.htm> (Accessed on 15 October 2016)

<sup>2</sup> US-China Institute (2011). Getting to Beijing. Henry Kissinger's Secret Visit to China 1971. USC <http://china.usc.edu/getting-beijing-henry-kissingers-secret-1971-trip> (Accessed on 15 October 2016)

Following the rise of the People’s Republic of China as the global power, the Bush government started to bring India closer to the western bloc, and this deal was one of the smartest moves by the Americans to lure the power hungry India. Containing China is one of the core objectives of the American foreign policy since the rise of China, and the growing Indo-US Nexus is one of the many ways to accomplish this aim. India needed nothing more than enriched uranium for its reactors and Washington came through for the Indians, thus starting one of the most threatening nuclear agreement to the world peace.

### **Chronology of the Agreement**

With the lifting of a long-term US Nuclear Embargo, the Indo-US Nuclear Deal is an agreement between the United States of America and the Republic of India that was initiated more than a decade ago and has played a significant role in shaping the regional politics of South Asia. It has not only inflated the Indian ambitions of a dominant “Great Power” in the region but has also raised many questions about the stability and security of the greater region. Many regional and international actors have shown serious concerns about this growing nexus between India and the United States and have predicted it as a serious threat to the people of the region. South Asia, when combined with China, holds more than half of the world’s population and facilitating a belligerent state like India in the region can have many dangerous consequences for the world.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>
<b>MARCH 2006</b>	Pres. Bush & PM Manmohan Singh Issue Joint Statement
<b>JULY 2008</b>	PM Singh calls for vote of confidence in Indian Parliament
<b>SEPTEMBER 2008</b>	House of Representatives approves with 298 votes in favor
<b>OCTOBER 2008</b>	Pres. Bush signs the law making it official
<b>OCTOBER 2008</b>	The agreement gets operationalized

Table 1. Brief summary of the Chronology of Agreement 123

The deal that is also known as U.S. – India Civil Nuclear Agreement or the 123 Agreement is backed by the Section 123 of the United States Atomic Energy Act of 1954. On 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 2005, the framework for this agreement was a joint understanding between then US President George W. Bush and the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Under this agreement between the two countries, India settled to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and to place all its

civil nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. In return, the United States agreed to start a full civil nuclear cooperation with India. It took almost three years to make the deal efficient, and the US had to amend its domestic nuclear law. It was finally approved by the Congress on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008 in Washington D.C. The agreement is officially known as the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Non-proliferation Enhancement Act, which became a public law after the approval of US Congress on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2008.<sup>3</sup>

### **India Gains through the Agreement**

In the regional context of South Asia, this agreement has enhanced the nuclear capabilities of India to an unprecedented height. Not only it has strengthened the US-India Nuclear Partnership but has also boosted the strategic abilities of India. The nuclear weapons, defensive and offensive missile system and the radioactive fueling capabilities of India have been enhanced due to this deal. The deals enable the international companies to do nuclear trading with India. It has also allowed India to buy the dual-use nuclear technology from the U.S. Following are some of the major gains of India through this nuclear agreement:

- Ability to buy dual-use technology from the US.
- The lift of US nuclear embargo on India.
- Attainment of enriched Uranium and Plutonium from international suppliers.
- Applying its enriched Uranium and Plutonium for the sole military purpose.
- Improvement of their civil and military nuclear infrastructure.
- Construction of new reactors facilitated by the US.
- Advance the nuclear bomb production program.
- Attempts to pose as a regional hegemon due to nuclear superiority.
- Import nuclear fuel from the US.
- Generation of high revenues regarding Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
- Ability to conduct free nuclear trade with the international nuclear traders.

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<sup>3</sup> Public Law, US Congress, UNITED STATES-INDIA NUCLEAR COOPERATION APPROVAL AND NONPROLIFERATION ENHANCEMENT ACT of 2008. (Accessed on 24 October 2016) <https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ369/PLAW-110publ369.pdf>



### **Negative Implications for the Region**

The first and foremost consequence of the deal in the region is that the deal violates the norms of the international non-proliferation. It has already boosted up Indian arms race with Pakistan. Even though the general comparison between India and Pakistan favors the Indian military, the two states are head-to-head with each other in the nuclear arms race. Pakistan has kept its nuclear doctrine ambiguous to maintain the element of surprise alive for the enemy. Pakistan has developed all its nuclear weapons on its own to safeguard its national interest, and the program is only used as a deterrent to keep the balance of power in South Asia stable. Pakistan has maintained its defense policy of minimum deterrence against India, and the advancement of its nuclear weapons is justified following the game-changing US-India nuclear deal.

Many international experts believe that Pakistan has a superior nuclear technology and despite the American assistance, the nuclear arsenal of India still lags behind that of Pakistan. According to a report, following Russia and the United States, Pakistan is believed to have the third biggest stockpile of active nuclear warheads. The report also states that Pakistan may operate four active plutonium reactors whereas India only operates one. However, the Pakistani authorities have not published any official facts and figures. Some international authors have even compared the arms race of South Asia with the Soviet-US arms race of the cold war. Despite the portrayal of Pakistan as a major nuclear force, the strategic advantage India has gained through the deal is a major game-changer for the geopolitical dynamics of South Asia and is a threat to regional security. The above information is based on the study conducted by the Stimson Center and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an American think tank in 2015.<sup>4</sup>

South Asia as a region is one of the most strategically significant areas of the world, and the geopolitical dynamics of the region always have deeper implications on the world politics. South Asia has become the centerpiece of global politics following this deal that was caused by the strategic partnership between the United States and India to contain the rising China. The People's Republic of China enjoys a friendly and peaceful relationship with each of the states in the region and the world. The threat perception of the West, particularly the United States against China is based on slightly miscalculated assumptions. China does not engage itself in any conflicts and proposes to resolve all the conflicts through peaceful means and bilateral talks. The role of China in the Kashmir dispute that has always been the focal point of the South Asian geopolitical arena has been praiseworthy. China is also playing its role in bringing an economic revolution in the region through CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, an initiative of OBOR (One-Belt-One-Road)). With this project, Central Asia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many other states will gain direct economic benefit. India however, said on several occasions that CPEC is unacceptable to India.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dalton, Krepon, (2015). A Normal Nuclear Pakistan. The Stimson Center and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (Accessed on 24 October, 2016)

<http://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/NormalNuclearPakistan.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/4899-cpec-unacceptable-to-india-modi-tells-china> (Accessed on 25 October, 2016)

Furthermore, the United States has even considered India to be its partners in the patrolling of South China Sea. Both countries have even held talks for this partnership. This is a clear indication that the US wants India to be its ally in containing China. However, the decisions New Delhi makes in the wake of this invitation will be critical to the regional security and stability. Following the nuclear deal, joint naval exercises and major strategic as well as defense cooperation, this invitation is another significant step taken by the US to promote India as a power in the region. India however, does not have the logistics, economy, resources and political credibility to pose as a great power in the region of South Asia.<sup>6</sup>



## **Conclusion**

There are other dark sides to the deal, and the major consequence of the deal is that by lifting the ban on India, US has cleared the way for other nations to sell nuclear fuel and technology to India. As a result of this deal, the other countries in the region have also started to shift the dynamics of their foreign policy. The aftermath of this deal has already brought the Chinese even closer to Pakistan and in addition to that, the important ally of India; Russia is also moving closer to Pakistan. With the initiatives of conducting joint military exercise and expression of interest in enhanced defense partnership, the former ally of India is reshaping the bilateral relations between itself and Pakistan. The defense partnerships of Pakistan have also improved with China, Turkey, GCC states and Sri Lanka over the years. The deal

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-india-usa-idUSKCN0VJ0AA>  
(Accessed on 25 October 2016)

has not only inflated the Indian ambitions of a dominant “Great Power” in the region but has also raised many questions about the stability and security of the greater region. Many regional and international actors have shown serious concerns about this growing nexus between India and the United States and have predicted it as a serious threat to the people of the region.

In a nutshell, the deal has proven to have sown the seeds of instability and arms race in the region. With the negligent diplomatic behavior of India regarding Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka and other states has already raised many questions regarding the Indian credibility to act like a responsible country in the region. India has several separatist movements within its borders, and Khalistan movement, the uprisings in Himachal Pardesh, Bengal and Assaam are some of the examples. Indian oppression in Kashmir has been raising international concerns for about seven decades now and in such situations, empowering India with such a fulfilling nuclear deal is a step that can be very dangerous for the stability of the region. This agreement has strengthened the Indian aims of attaining an absolute hegemony over South Asia. Therefore, the United States needs to re-evaluate its nuclear policy with India to ensure a more peaceful South Asia.

