



## India Is Not a Precedent

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Imagine a huge nation, a huge democracy, increasingly prosperous, increasingly powerful and increasingly sympathetic to the ideological and strategic objectives of the United States and its democratic allies around the world. Imagine that this powerful, prosperous, democratic nation sits on the same continent with Russia and China, two huge geopolitical problems waiting to happen. Imagine that this nation possesses a navy capable of helping patrol strategically vital waterways and a military force capable of acting as a deterrent against powerful neighbors. Finally, imagine that this nation, despite its power, has no record of using it for aggressive purposes but has been a remarkably peaceful and often constructive member of the global community.

Would we or would we not want to have the closest possible relationship, partnership, even alliance with such a country as we head into an uncertain future?

The answer, as Bismarck would have said, is a no-brainer. That is why earlier this month the Bush administration made a deal with this nation, India, to provide it with civilian nuclear technology. In the process, the administration effectively let India off the hook for its decades-old nuclear weapons program and made an exception to its otherwise strict refusal to provide civilian nuclear technology to nations that do not abide by certain international guidelines. The result, critics have asserted, is that other nations may be encouraged to follow India's path and that the nuclear non-

proliferation "regime" has therefore been damaged.

No doubt it has been damaged. But the question is whether the benefits outweigh the costs. I will leave to others the matter of whether this deal will really encourage, say, Brazil or South Africa to resume nuclear weapons programs they long ago abandoned, though I'm inclined to doubt it. The bigger question likely to consume endless hours of hearings on Capitol Hill in coming weeks is what effect the deal will have on the problem of Iran. Some will argue that the Indian nuclear deal harms efforts to halt Iran's nuclear weapons program because it erects a double standard: We are willing to let India do what we are not willing to let Iran do.

The question is interesting in theory. In the real world, it's not that interesting. The notion that the Indian deal will set back prospects for a diplomatic deal with Iran assumes that such prospects exist. All available evidence suggests otherwise. The Iranian government appears committed to building nuclear weapons and will not be deterred by threats -- except possibly the threat of removal by military means -- or won over by blandishments. It has risked international isolation and economic sanctions and even the remote threat of U.S. air and missile strikes to keep its program going. Are we supposed to believe that the main obstacle standing in the way of a happy resolution to the Iranian nuclear crisis is now the Indian deal?

As for double standards, yes, we have double standards. The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty erected a gargantuan double standard. It declared that

possession of the world's most devastating and militarily decisive weapons would be limited to the five nations that already possessed them. And this was a particularly mindless kind of double standard, since membership in the nuclear "club" was not based on justice or morality or strategic judgment or politics but simply on circumstance: Whoever had figured out how to build nuclear weapons by 1968 was in. At least our double standard for India makes strategic, diplomatic, ideological and political sense.

Nor should we delude ourselves that the nuclear double standard has been preserved over the years by a treaty. If other nations have denied themselves nuclear weapons programs it is because (a) they did not believe they needed them, (b) they did not have the wherewithal to build them or (c) they feared punishment at the hands of the nuclear powers if they tried to build them. To the degree that nonproliferation has succeeded, it has been due less to the treaty than to the concerted actions of the nuclear powers. And to the degree that it has failed, that is also due to the actions of the nuclear powers, which provided materials and technologies to states such as Pakistan, North Korea and Iran.

In fact, the nonproliferation "regime" may now be collapsing. That doesn't mean we should precipitously abandon it. We have an interest in slowing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the nonproliferation regime remains one tool of persuasion. But as in the past, and as always in international affairs, there must be some adjustment to reality. One aspect of the present reality is that India has long

been a nuclear power, and this deal doesn't make it more of one. Another part of the present reality is that North Korea and Iran are probably going to be nuclear powers, too, and in any case the nonproliferation "regime" is not going to stop them.

Were Congress somehow to reject the administration's deal in some effort to

maintain a consistent principle on nonproliferation, it would have no effect on Iran's decisions. But that futile gesture would have a devastating effect on U.S. relations with India. In our less-than-ideal world, where, we are often told, America needs good friends and allies, that would be a terrible bargain.

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