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# The India-US Nuclear Cooperation Agreement: Explaining the Contentious Indian Debate

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## The India-U.S. Nuclear Cooperation Agreement

*Explaining the Contentious Indian Debate*

### ABSTRACT

The U.S.-India civil nuclear energy agreement triggered a contentious debate in India from 2005 to 2008. Regional political actors played crucial and unanticipated roles in the debate. We present explanations for the positions adopted by the main actors and the level of contention. We find that parties' positions were driven not by ideology but by the compulsions of coalition politics.

**KEYWORDS:** India, nuclear deal, coalition, party politics, Left, Congress, BJP, regional parties

IN JULY 2008, INDIA'S RULING PARTY, the 14-party United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Congress Party, faced a confidence vote in Parliament over India's 2005 nuclear accord with the U.S. The UPA government survived, but by the skin of its teeth: 275 Members of Parliament (MPs) voted for the government, and 256 against. Three years earlier, when he returned to New Delhi after inking the nuclear cooperation agreement with Washington, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh surely had never imagined that the deal would endanger his government. The contentious nature of the debate over the nuclear agreement with the United States surprised observers outside India, who considered that the country had secured itself a great bargain, with few concessions.

What explains the contentious nature of the national debate and its eventual outcome? How do we account for positions adopted by the major political actors in India? These questions are important for understanding

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political processes in the world's largest democracy, and have significant policy implications for the foreign relations of a rising power. To date, despite the increasing importance of regional parties in Indian politics, little attention has been paid to their effects on foreign policy formulation.

The debate over the nuclear deal furnishes evidence of two new trends in Indian politics. First, nuclear policy issues are no longer insulated from domestic political considerations. Second, regional parties that traditionally paid little attention to foreign policy issues are increasingly engaged in debating them. On the specific issue of the nuclear deal, we argue that parties' positions were driven not by ideology but by the compulsions of domestic coalition politics.

In the first section, we provide a brief background on Indian nuclear policy and the negotiation of the agreement with the U.S. In the second section, we lay out the configuration of political power in New Delhi and the twists in the debate over the deal. These two sections provide the context for our argument. In section three, we introduce two possible explanations for the way in which the debate unfolded in India: electoral strategy and ideology. In section four, we argue for an alternative explanation: domestic coalition politics among non-national parties. The final section demonstrates that the rhetorical strategies deployed by the actors reduced the space for compromise. In our conclusion, we address the implications of our findings in the case of the India-U.S. nuclear deal for other foreign policy issues.

## **INDIAN NUCLEAR POLICY AND THE INDIA-U.S. NUCLEAR AGREEMENT**

India's atomic program has existed as long as the independent Indian state, beginning with the establishment of the Atomic Energy Commission in 1948. The promise of atomic energy for electricity generation and other peaceful purposes was much anticipated. However, from the time of its establishment, the nuclear complex in India incorporated a military aspect. Work on nuclear weapons capability was accelerated after the Chinese nuclear test in 1964. India refused to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which came into force in 1970. By staying out of the NPT and continuing low-key weapons development, India sent a message to the world that it intended to retain the weapons option.

By 1974, India had exercised the option to test a nuclear device, euphemistically terming it a "peaceful nuclear explosion" rather than a weapons

test. For the next 24 years, although the official Indian position was that nuclear research and development were dedicated to civilian uses, the U.S. and other countries imposed controls on the export of sensitive nuclear technology to India.

The balancing act between nuclear and non-nuclear international status became more difficult for India once the Cold War ended. The world's nightmares now featured "rogue states," or worse, terrorists armed with nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the NPT and the regime that grew around it were gaining strength in diplomatic circles. Realizing that it would only face more intense pressure to disarm in the future, India decided to legitimize its nuclear arsenal. Paradoxically, its first step in doing so was to violate an unwritten international norm and conduct tests in May 1998. This time the government's press release made sure to mention that weapon designs had been tested, and that India was now a nuclear weapons state. While still refusing to sign the NPT, India made clear its intention of joining the club of states recognized by that treaty as legitimate holders of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. was India's primary interlocutor in this effort. The two countries undertook 14 rounds of talks (known as the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott dialogues) between 1998 and 2000. India-U.S. relations had begun to improve in the latter years of Bill Clinton's administration as the U.S. recognized the need for closer strategic ties in Asia. George W. Bush's administration took a particular interest in civilian high-technology trade, especially in nuclear technology. In July 2005, India and the U.S. issued a joint statement declaring that "as a *responsible state with advanced nuclear technology*, India should acquire the same benefits and advantages as other such states."<sup>1</sup>

Many took this statement to mean that the superpower had accepted India's self-declared status as a nuclear weapons state.<sup>2</sup> It became the foundation for the agreement between India and the U.S. on cooperation in the

1. "Joint Statement between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, July 18, 2005, <<http://georgewebush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/07/20050718-6.html>>. Emphasis ours.

2. The State Department tried to refute this implication: "By taking this decision, we are not recognizing India as a nuclear weapons state. We are simply opening up a channel in order to cooperate on a commercial basis and a technological basis on nuclear power itself and that's a very important distinction." R. Nicholas Burns, "Briefing on the Signing of the Global Partnership Agreement between the United States and India," U.S. State Department, <<http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/2005/49831.htm>>.

field of civilian nuclear energy. Over the next three years, this nuclear “deal” faced several hurdles as it made its way through the congressional approval process in the U.S. while obtaining the blessing of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as well as the multilateral Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The most unexpected obstacle, and one that nearly killed the deal, was domestic opposition in India.

### DOMESTIC POLITICS AND NUCLEAR POLICY IN INDIA

Although regional parties in India have risen in importance in recent years, consequences for the country’s security policy and ramifications for international relations have not yet been analyzed in depth. There are several instances where regional actors have intervened in foreign policy matters. For example, in 2011 West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee forced the government in New Delhi to modify its stance on foreign multi-brand retail. That same year, she also delayed the India-Bangladesh Teesta water-sharing agreement. Such examples demonstrate a larger shift of political power in India from the center to the states, already apparent in institutional changes such as discrete foreign investment strategies at the state level. How does this shift in domestic politics affect foreign policy in general and nuclear policy in particular? We find that regional actors’ interventions in foreign policy tend to follow short-term political incentives rather than ideology.

It is important to note the implications of imputing a link between nuclear policy and domestic politics for the legitimacy of the Indian weapons program. Indian decision-makers insist that their programs are motivated solely by security threats. They refute theories emphasizing “domestic” or “symbolic” motivations behind their country’s nuclear weapons capability. It is also common for scientific and strategic elites to insist that decisions on nuclear policy are, and should be, above the fray of internal contention. Whether they support the India-U.S. nuclear deal or not, they deplore its “politicization.”<sup>3</sup>

#### Institutional Framework

Whereas in the U.S., President Bush was required to obtain the consent of Congress to give the bilateral agreement legal force, the Singh government

3. Sheela Bhatt, “It Is Sad That the N-Deal Is Smeared in Murky Politics,” Rediff India, <<http://in.rediff.com/news/2008/jul/08sheela.htm?zcc=rl>>.

did not need, and therefore did not seek, the approval of the legislature to ratify the agreement. The Indian Constitution allows the executive to enter into international agreements and sign treaties without specific oversight by Parliament. The furor over the nuclear deal from 2005–08 was so intense that there have been calls for a constitutional amendment obliging the government to subject proposed international agreements to public referenda and parliamentary approval.<sup>4</sup>

The Indian Parliament is only able to express its dissatisfaction with foreign policy through no-confidence votes, which would bring down the government if passed. The electorate also has the opportunity to punish the government at the polls. With respect to the former, as we have seen above, the Singh government narrowly won the confidence vote—275 to 256 votes. In the latter case, the nuclear policy issue was on trial in the summer 2009 general elections. Singh's Congress won. We can thus assert that signing the nuclear deal was not fatal to the party's chances at the hustings.

### Coalition Power Configuration

But Singh's government faced other challenges to its survival, namely, from members of its own UPA coalition. In 2004, the UPA won 226 out of the 543 seats in the 14th Lok Sabha (lower house). The election made "king-makers" of the two Communist parties that together controlled 59 seats. They supported the UPA government in Parliament "from the outside," meaning that they voted with the ruling party on a case-by-case basis and could threaten the Singh government's survival at any time by withdrawing their support from the UPA.

The leaders of the two Communist parties were initially irked by the secret diplomacy that surrounded the nuclear deal with the U.S. From the beginning of the debate until its conclusion, they consistently claimed the right of the Parliament to conduct a debate on the issue and the duty of the executive to submit international engagements to the vote of elected representatives. Prakash Karat, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) declared in 2006: "We do not see this [ . . . ] as a party issue. It is

4. Medha Patkar, Aruna Roy, and Sandeep Pandey, "Amend Constitution to Enable Public Debate," Rediff.com, <<http://in.rediff.com/news/2007/aug/23guest1.htm>>; Rekha Saxena, "Treaty Making Powers: A Case for Federalisation and Parliamentarisation," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42:1 (2007), pp. 24–28.

TABLE 1. Alliances in the 14th Lok Sabha (2004–09)

<i>UPA</i>	<i>NDA</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
226	169	59*	89	543

SOURCE: Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha, vol. 1, <[http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main/statisticalreports/LS\\_2004/Vol\\_I\\_LS\\_2004.pdf](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/statisticalreports/LS_2004/Vol_I_LS_2004.pdf)>.

\*Minus one seat for the Speaker's post.

a national issue and Parliament should discuss since it is being used [by the U.S.] for a wider strategic alliance . . ." (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

On his return from the U.S. in July 2005, Prime Minister Singh made a formal statement in Parliament assuring MPs that national "autonomy of decision-making" would be preserved while India accepted more of the responsibilities of "nuclear powers."<sup>6</sup> By the time Singh addressed Parliament again in 2006, the political waters were roiling. In this speech, he introduced the Separation Plan, under which 14 of 22 Indian nuclear reactors designated as "civilian" would be placed under multilateral IAEA safeguards. Opposition leaders raised strenuous objections to the plan, on the grounds that it compromised India's autonomy in strategic matters. In 2007 the Congress Party was forced to institute mechanisms for consultations with its coalition partners. Singh also faced dissension within the Congress itself. Party members were concerned that conflicts over the nuclear agreement would trigger early elections, which they wished to avoid considering the country's rampant inflation and a slowdown in economic growth. The Communist parties subsequently threatened to withdraw support from the UPA, thus bringing down the government. Capitalizing on the Congress's desire to avoid elections, they pushed it to the brink.<sup>7</sup> Matters came to a head in July 2008 when the king-making Communist parties finally withdrew support from the UPA.

The main opposition was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Although the BJP had initiated negotiations with the United States in the hopes of securing an agreement in the nuclear power sector, it opposed the provisions of the 2005 agreement as they were negotiated by the UPA government. Senior BJP leader Jaswant Singh urged

5. Anon., "Karat Warns Centre on Foreign Policy," *Hindu*, July 24, 2006.

6. Manmohan Singh, "Statement in Parliament on U.S. Visit," *Tribune*, July 7, 2005.

7. Mian Ridge, "India at an Impasse over Civilian Nuclear Deal," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 26, 2008.

the government “to always bear in mind that strategic partnership with the US must never be permitted to become either ‘strategic dependency’ or to convert itself into a ‘strategic lock-in’ with US national and strategic interests, whether in this region or globally.”<sup>8</sup> The BJP accused the government of “surrendering” to the U.S. on the nuclear Separation Plan and predicted that this would result in a deficit of fissile material for the manufacture of warheads. BJP member and former National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra said that IAEA safeguards would curb India’s capacity to maintain a credible minimum deterrent.<sup>9</sup> MP and former Union minister Murli Manohar Joshi termed the proposed deal “unacceptable,” expressing apprehension that it would freeze India’s deterrence capabilities. The BJP position by 2008 shifted from strong opposition to qualified or conditional support for the nuclear agreement.<sup>10</sup>

#### EXPLAINING THE POSITIONS: ELECTORAL STRATEGY AND PARTY IDEOLOGY

Why was the Indian debate on the nuclear deal so contentious? What was at the root of the positions adopted by the main parties? Could *electoral strategy* or *party ideology* provide the answers? We address both explanations in this section and suggest that they fall short. Instead, as we will argue in the next section, the best explanation is found in the domestic configuration of *coalition politics*.

##### Electoral Strategy

Could parties gain electoral appeal by either supporting or opposing the deal? Doubtful. Nuclear policies are not sure-fire vote-getters. As a recent study claims, “[T]he salient issues in elections center on complex mixes of distribution, dignity, and domestic political alliance that rarely have anything to do with broad grand strategy or security policy issues.”<sup>11</sup> Defense issues in general, and nuclear issues in particular, have simply not been salient in Indian elections, as suggested by the misfortunes of the two governments that

8. Anon., “Nuclear Separation Plan a ‘Surrender’ to U.S.: B.J.P.,” *Outlook*, March 6, 2006.

9. “India Must Re-negotiate Its Nuclear Deal with U.S.: Mishra,” *ibid.*, February 7, 2006.

10. Praful Bidwai, “Beyond the Political Crisis,” *National Herald*, September 8, 2007.

11. Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland, “Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy,” *India Review* 11:2 (2012), p. 78.

TABLE 2. Voter's Prioritization of Issues in Election (2009, in %)

<i>Issues in the Elections</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Not Heard</i>
Price rise	48	21	29
Terrorist attacks	39	23	36
Livelihood/employment	34	20	47
Farmers' suicides	30	21	47
Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal	18	19	61

SOURCE: NES 2009, weighted data set, quoted in National Election Analysis, *Economic and Political Weekly* 44:39, p. 80.

NOTE: Figures do not total 100%; the remaining responses were "No opinion."

conducted nuclear tests. A year after the first test in 1974, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was vulnerable enough to declare an internal Emergency—suspension of democratic processes—for the first (and last) time in India's history. And shortly after the 1998 tests, the BJP lost state elections in three northern strongholds and faced new elections by early 1999.

A large survey conducted after the 1999 general election revealed that the majority of the electorate had not even heard about the 1998 nuclear tests.<sup>12</sup> A similar post-election opinion poll from 2009 shows that nearly two-thirds of respondents had not heard about the nuclear deal, and only 18% of those who had heard considered it a salient issue (see Table 2).

So could *opposing* the deal bring electoral support to parties? A survey found that no matter which way the data are segmented—by socioeconomic group, gender, age, or rural-urban distribution—Indians have the warmest feelings toward the U.S. as compared to other global powers. This poll also revealed that states with higher concentrations of Muslims are in fact *not* more likely to harbor anti-American feelings.<sup>13</sup> Despite this, a number of smaller parties sought to garner votes from Muslims whom they assumed would be against the U.S. and thus the nuclear deal. Surprisingly, certain Leftist politicians supported that view. In June 2008, CPI-M Politburo member M. K. Pandhe warned the Samajwadi (Socialist) Party (SP) that

12. Yogendra Yadav, Oliver Heath, and Anindya Saha, "Issues and the Verdict," *Frontline*, November 13–26, 1999.

13. Devesh Kapur, "India-U.S. Relations: What Does the Indian Public Think?" Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, November 4 (2007), <<http://casi.ssc.upenn.edu/iit/deveshkapur>>.

support of the deal would harm its Muslim base.<sup>14</sup> These strategies were profoundly opportunistic as well as factually wrong. The deal had no impact on the Muslim vote in the subsequent elections.<sup>15</sup> In fact, during the confidence vote debate, the two Muslim parties represented in Parliament—the People’s Democratic Party and the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (Council of the Union of Muslims)—as well as the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, a party that represented the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir, declared their support for the deal and the UPA coalition, and denounced attempts to communalize the issue.<sup>16</sup>

In the 2009 general elections, the UPA turned in an impressive performance, winning 258 seats in Parliament, with the Congress contributing 206. The BJP and its allies only won 160 seats, with the CPI-M winning only 16 (27 fewer than in the previous elections) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) only four. Even in its stronghold of Kerala, the CPI-M lost 10 seats out of the 14 it contested, while the CPI lost all four. In West Bengal, another stronghold, the CPI-M won a historic low number of nine seats.<sup>17</sup> In short, the nuclear issue does not seem to have hurt the Congress nor benefited the opposition.

However, the lack of salience of nuclear issues in elections does not imply that the nuclear issue has no role in the theater of domestic politics. Parties have used nuclear postures to gain or consolidate power. In May 1998, a basic elite consensus on preserving the nuclear weapons option allowed the BJP to take the bold step of nuclear testing, in order to become the “party of national security.” Here nuclear testing was consonant with the BJP’s long-term goals to portray itself as strong on national security. In the same way, the debate over the U.S. nuclear deal provided political parties with rhetorical resources. Though positions on nuclear policy help build parties’ reputations and broad appeal in the long term, they are not significant in parties’ planning for elections.

14. Anon., “Communal Communist,” *Times of India*, June 25, 2008. The party later distanced itself from this statement, which brought a communal taint to the debate.

15. Abusaleh Shariff, “What’s Religion Got to Do with 123?” *Indian Express*, August 22, 2007; Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, “Re-nationalization of India’s Political Party System or Continued Prevalence of Regionalism and Ethnicity? Evidence from the 2009 General Elections,” *Asian Survey* 51:6 (2011), pp. 1090–1112.

16. Anon., “P.M. Will Resign before Trust Vote: Atiq Ahmed,” *Times of India*, July 17, 2008.

17. Election Commission of India, *General Elections 2009 Report*, at <[http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main/ElectionStatistics.aspx](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/ElectionStatistics.aspx)>.

## Grand Strategy

If electoral strategies do not explain the positions adopted by political parties in the debate between 2005 and 2008, can differences in their grand strategies—their visions of how India should relate to the world—provide an explanation? During the Cold War, India's Congress governments adopted an ideology of non-alignment in foreign policy, accompanied by a semi-socialist stance of self-reliance and import-substituting state-led industrialization. Today, as in 2005, India must increasingly define itself in the global arena in relation to the sole superpower, the United States. India was also rapidly opening up to the international economy. The proportion of total trade to gross domestic product (GDP) reached 43.1% in 2005–06.<sup>18</sup> In 2010 this ratio was approximately 35%.<sup>19</sup> Foreign direct investment (FDI) was becoming increasingly important. Over the past decade, India maintained a 7% real annual GDP growth rate. Political non-alignment and economic self-reliance were no longer viable ideological positions.

At first blush, it may seem that India's embrace of the nuclear deal was a response to the energy demands generated by rapid economic growth. After all, in 2005 India was the world's fifth-largest energy consumer, and may be the third-largest by 2030.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in support of the nuclear deal, Singh's Congress-led UPA government argued that nuclear energy would contribute to satisfying these rising energy needs. Yet, nuclear energy currently makes up only around 3% of power generated and is unlikely to exceed 10% in the medium term.<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned above, the Congress Party, which was in power in 2005, had maintained a grand strategy of political non-alignment and economic self-sufficiency. This continuity in ideology was facilitated by the dominance of the Nehru-Gandhi family in the party's leadership. Prime Minister Singh, who espoused a more pragmatic approach, saw the nuclear deal as a crucial step in strengthening relations with the United States. Ashley Tellis, one of the U.S. architects of the deal, opined that Singh had a twofold aspiration for his legacy: to consolidate India's relationship with the U.S. and to repair the relationship

18. Arvind Panagariya, *India: The Emerging Giant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xvi.

19. European Commission Directorate-General of Trade, "India: Main Economic Indicators," European Commission, <[http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_113390.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113390.pdf)>.

20. Xenia Dormandy, "Is India, or Will It Be, a Responsible International Stakeholder?" *Washington Quarterly* 30:3 (2007), pp. 117–130.

21. Anon., "Slowdown Not to Affect India's Nuclear Plans," *Business Standard*, January 29, 2011.

with Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Singh capitalized on the opportunity presented by a bilateralist, Republican Bush administration that placed little faith in traditional arms control and was greatly interested in countering the rise of China.

The Left parties have historically been accused of divided loyalties when it comes to foreign policy because of their ideological connections to the Soviet Union (in the case of the CPI), and to China (in the case of the CPI-M). Compared to other Indian parties, the Left parties tend to be suspicious of U.S. influence on global governance mechanisms. At the same time, these parties generally support international regimes in areas such as human rights, ecology, and arms control. In the 1990s, for instance, they urged India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which would have restricted India's nuclear weapons development. The BJP, which began as a Hindu nationalist party, achieved electoral success in the 1990s by presenting itself as a strong modern leader for a rising India; its 1998 nuclear tests fit this image.

It is tempting to argue that parties chose their positions in the debate over the nuclear deal in keeping with these ideological traditions. Communist leaders, it is alleged, are anti-American.<sup>23</sup> Yet, these leaders have in the past endorsed arms control mechanisms like the CTBT that are backed by the U.S. Moreover, they have been open to foreign investment when they perceived that it would help their position. Clearly, considerations beyond the ideological were at play on the nuclear deal.

The radical ideological opposition of the Left to the nuclear deal was tamed by the pragmatic necessity of evading responsibility for bringing down the UPA administration and paving the way for the BJP's return to power. As CPI-M General Secretary Prakash Karat acknowledged: "The Left parties continue to accord priority to having a secular government and keeping the communal forces at bay. But this cannot be taken by the UPA government as license to go ahead with a long-term agreement that has such serious implications for India's independent foreign policy and sovereignty."<sup>24</sup> When in 2007 the BJP proposed a confidence vote, the Left parties did not support it, because it would have strengthened their arch-enemy, the BJP.<sup>25</sup>

22. Karthika Sasikumar interview with Ashley Tellis, former senior advisor, U.S. State Dept., Washington, D.C., March 29, 2011.

23. Fareed Zakaria, "Nixon to China, Bush to India," *Newsweek*, February 27, 2006.

24. Prakash Karat, "Why the C.P.I.(M) and the Left Oppose the Nuclear Deal," *Hindu*, August 20, 2007.

25. Anon., "C.P.M. Won't Pull Down Govt, Says Yechury," *Statesman*, March 12, 2006.

Moreover, in the debate over the nuclear deal, the Left moved *away* from its previous pro-disarmament position and toward a new pro-sovereignty/national interest stand. The CPI's Central Secretariat in its first response to the 2005 agreement lamented that the U.S. had neither supported India's claim to U.N. Security Council membership nor recognized it as a nuclear weapons power, but merely as a "state with advanced nuclear technology." This statement also criticized the move to open India's civilian facilities for inspection by the IAEA as a "unilateral reversal of India's earlier nuclear policy without any prior discussion in Parliament, the UPA or with the Left . . ." While at this point the CPI-M maintained that "India had always opposed the discriminatory policies of the nuclear haves and was committed to nuclear disarmament and making the world free of nuclear weapons . . .,"<sup>26</sup> it was moving from an internationalist to a nationalist position. Moreover, many party members were concerned about presenting an anti-development image in rejecting nuclear energy. For example, the CPI-M Chief Minister of West Bengal Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee opposed the threat to topple the central government for fear that it would hurt his state's development.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, one cannot account for the BJP's stance with ideology alone. The party's government was the first to engage the U.S. in nuclear negotiations. Moreover, the deal was consonant with the BJP's re-orientation of foreign policy away from antipathy to the superpowers in the 1990s. Jaswant Singh characterized his party's opposition to the deal as the result of the "push and pull of parliamentary politics" rather than "principled."<sup>28</sup> Analyst C. Raja Mohan more bluntly termed it "political opportunism."<sup>29</sup>

#### EXPLAINING THE POSITIONS: COALITION POLITICS

We argue that the configuration of the ruling coalition—the coalition politics of numbers—mattered more than electoral strategy or party ideology in determining parties' positions.

26. Anon., "Left Attacks Joint Statement," *Hindu*, July 22, 2005.

27. Anon., "Bengal's Development Will Be Hurt if Support Is Withdrawn, Warns C.M.," *Economic Times*, August 23, 2008.

28. Karthika Sasikumar interview with Jaswant Singh, former BJP minister for Defence and minister for External Affairs, New Delhi, December 4, 2010.

29. Karthika Sasikumar telephone interview with C. Raja Mohan, journalist and security analyst, December 11, 2010.

### The Fragile Coalition of 2004

The “coalition era” of Indian politics, which began in 1998 and since which time no single party has ruled India alone, assumed that regional parties would coalesce around the two “poles” of the Congress and the BJP.<sup>30</sup> The two parties ran their coalitions quite differently. When it held power in New Delhi, the BJP dominated its NDA coalition. Its smaller regional allies had, and wanted, little influence on foreign policy. Key portfolios (External Affairs, Defense, and Finance) were reserved for the BJP. Furthermore, during this time, the Prime Minister’s Office acquired a National Security Advisor, a non-accountable executive position.

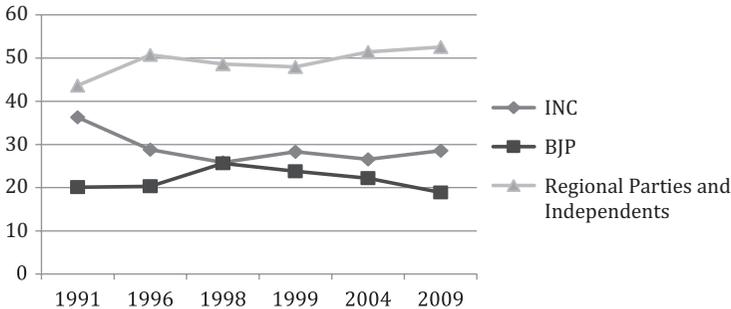
In contrast, the Congress depended more on the allies of its UPA coalition, particularly the Left, and thus was unable to “sanctuarize” foreign policy. The Congress had negotiated with other UPA constituents a Common Minimum Program (CMP) that provided a framework for governmental action—although, interestingly, the document made no mention of nuclear policy. Despite the constraints of the “coalition era,” the Congress Party tried to continue with its previous practice of centralizing power, resisting demands to put nuclear negotiations on the agenda for parliamentary debate. This was perceived as a breach of “coalition dharma,” the obligation to accommodate the views of smaller partners, and motivated the Left coalition partners’ opposition to the nuclear deal. The refusal to bring the issue to Parliament, although legally justified, was at odds with the growing power and expectations of a legislature where numerically small parties held great bargaining power because they boosted coalition numbers. Such refusal stoked resentment among all political parties.<sup>31</sup> Even the institution of a dialogue mechanism called the “UPA-Left Committee” intended to provide a space for discussion within the coalition became a way for Congress to appease and control the Left.

These discussions delayed India’s negotiations with the IAEA on a plan that would bring the designated nuclear plants under multilateral safeguards.

30. Katharine Adeney and Lawrence Sáez, *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); N. Jose Chander, *Coalition Politics: The Indian Experience* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co., 2004); K. K. Kailash, “Middle Game in Coalition Politics,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 42:4 (2007); Eswaran Sridharan, “Electoral Coalitions in 2004 General Elections,” *ibid.*, 39:51 (2004).

31. “Automatic’ Withdrawal of Support if Govt Talks to I.A.E.A.,” *Business Standard*, August 22, 2007.

FIGURE 1. Vote Share of the Congress, BJP, and Regional Parties since 1991



SOURCE: Adapted from the Election Commission General Elections Reports. Quoted from Jaffrelot and Verniers, "Re-nationalization of India's Political Party System or Continued Prevalence of Regionalism and Ethnicity? Evidence from the 2009 General Elections," p. 1099.

The Left initially threatened an automatic withdrawal of support if the government approached the IAEA but eventually agreed that the international agency could consider a safeguards plan while negotiations continued with the Congress. In retrospect, CPI-M leader Prakash Karat admitted that this agreement was a mistake because it gave the initiative to an external actor.<sup>32</sup>

### Positions of Regional and Non-Aligned Parties

The debate over the nuclear deal was expected to be confined to three players—the BJP, the Congress, and the Congress's Communist allies. In an unexpected turn of events, smaller, regional parties, that traditionally had never engaged in foreign policy debates, intervened and became decisive at the moment of the government's 2008 test through the confidence vote in Parliament. The bargaining power of regional parties had been rising as their share of the vote grew, outstripping the vote share commanded by national parties (see Figure 1). These parties' positions on national and international issues essentially formed bargaining chips with which to demand policies favorable to their constituencies.

These small regional parties tend to form loosely organized and fluctuating alliances. The United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA), for example,

32. Karthika Sasikumar interview with Prakash Karat, then general secretary, CPI-M, New Delhi, December 9, 2010.

TABLE 3. UNPA Strength (Partywise, in %)

<i>UNPA</i>	2004	2009
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	19	21
Telugu Desam Party	5	6
All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)	—	9
Janata Dal (Secular)	3	3
Haryana Janhit Congress	—	1
Biju Janata Dal	11	14
Pattali Mallak Katchi (PMK)	6	—
Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK)	4	1
<i>Total</i>	48	55

SOURCE: Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha, vol. 1.

TABLE 4. Former UNPA Member Performances (Partywise, in %)

	2004	2009
Samajwadi Party	36	22
Telangana Rashtra Samithi	5	2
Asom Gana Parishad	2	1
Indian National Lok Dal	—	—

SOURCE: Ibid.

was formed shortly before the general elections, purely out of political expediency.<sup>33</sup> Although UNPA members initially rejected the nuclear deal, their positions changed in accordance with a fast-changing political calculus (see Table 3 and Table 4).

After the Left's withdrawal of support in July 2008, the Congress, realizing that it required 43 votes to win the confidence vote, initiated negotiations with regional parties. These parties then seized the opportunity to formulate claims. For example, the separatist Telangana Rashtra Samithi (Telangana National Council) offered to trade its support of Congress for the creation of an autonomous state of Telangana (carved out from Andhra Pradesh),<sup>34</sup> while the SP bargained for a seat-sharing agreement in Uttar Pradesh with the

33. V. Krishna Ananth, "The Third Front Mirage Again," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43:32 (2008).

34. Anon., "K.C.R.: Telangana in Return for N-vote," *Asian Age*, July 9, 2008.

Congress for the general election. Regional parties demanded similar deals, including seat-sharing agreements, from the BJP. The bargains were struck a few weeks in advance of the vote.

As a result, the UNPA virtually disintegrated in the lead-up to the confidence vote. Two weeks before the vote, the UNPA leaders were no longer able to speak in a cohesive manner. Declaring that they would be guided by the views of eminent nuclear scientists, they reserved their final decision for the day of the vote.<sup>35</sup>

Three regional party constituents—the Asom Gana Parishad (Assam People's Association), the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, and the Indian National Lok Dal (Indian National People's Party)—came out in opposition to Congress's nuclear deal, lured by the prospect of participating in a future BJP-led government. Likewise, the strongest UNPA constituents such as the BSP, whose leader Mayawati was projected as a prime ministerial candidate, consistently opposed the deal. In fact, the BSP was the first to withdraw support from the UNPA.

Ultimately, the SP saved the government during the vote of confidence, reversing its original position. In August 2007, SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav had declared: "We strongly oppose the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal which amounts to total surrender before a foreign power. It will have very damaging consequences in the future . . . it is a very dangerous agreement under which we will be completely enslaved."<sup>36</sup> And, until June 2008, the SP opposed the deal.<sup>37</sup> However, it reversed its position (and was subsequently expelled from the UNPA) once it became clear that the Left would withdraw support from the Congress-led UPA and make the SP's votes in Parliament indispensable to the UPA's viability. Interestingly, the intervention of former president and architect of India's nuclear program, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, was used to justify the switch. Yadav said: "Ex-President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's advice prompted my decision to back the UPA government over the nuke deal . . . when countries like China and Pakistan are signing similar deals, why should India lag behind? . . . After all, the deal will make the country self-sufficient on the energy front."<sup>38</sup>

35. Ravish Tiwari, "S.P. Deals Kalam Trump Card," *Indian Express*, July 4, 2008.

36. Hemendra Singh Bartwal, "Third Front for Voting on Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal," *Hindustan Times*, August 10, 2007.

37. Srinand Jha, "Mulayam, Amar Deny Ties with Congress," *ibid.*, June 24, 2008.

38. Anon., "Kalam Influenced My Decision: Mulayam," *ibid.*, July 7, 2008. It is also possible that his change of heart stemmed from the possibility that the UPA government would use a pending

Ironically, the nuclear deal (and the government) were ultimately saved by those political parties that took the least interest in it at the initial stage. The conversion of a debate over an international nuclear agreement into a debate about the survival of the government triggered their involvement. This feature of the parliamentary system in India means that foreign policy issues cannot be separated from the larger currents of national politics—defined by the coalition politics of numbers.

### EXPLAINING CONTENTION: MOBILIZATION OF RHETORICAL RESOURCES

Beyond coalition politics, the rhetorical resources mobilized by all sides also rendered the debate intractably contentious. The rhetoric drastically reduced the space for compromise among members of the two coalitions, already limited by entrenched positions. This eventually enabled the moderate Congress to win the rhetorical battle, as the positions of the Left and the Right suffered from internal contradictions.

#### A Heated and Puzzling Debate

The debate on the nuclear agreement, of an unprecedented intensity, left substantive issues unaddressed. It was also characterized by some puzzling reversals. The Left parties expressed concerns about India's sovereignty and nuclear security, while the BJP, which ironically had initiated the deal, spoke against it. To recap: The Left parties had historically opposed the nuclear weapons program. In 1998 they organized rallies denouncing the nuclear tests as manifestations of the BJP's chauvinistic religious nationalism. The Left also has historically supported multilateral arms control. Yet, in the 2005–08 period, we find the leaders of the Left raising the flag of national sovereignty. A. B. Bardhan, CPI general secretary, said in response to the negotiations, "I don't think we fought for our freedom to be slaves once again."<sup>39</sup> Prakash Karat also used the rhetoric of sovereignty to showcase his opposition to the deal: "This is not a simple deal. It'll affect the sovereignty of the country's strategic relations,

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disproportionate assets investigation against him as leverage to ensure the SP's support during the vote. Ashish Khetan, "Guilty. Not Guilty. Guilty?" *Tehelka*, May 5, 2012, <[http://archive.tehelka.com/story\\_main52.asp?filename=Neo50512Coverstory.asp](http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main52.asp?filename=Neo50512Coverstory.asp)>.

39. Tanmay Chatterjee, "Left Rallies against N-deal, Exercise," *Hindustan Times*, September 5, 2007.

defence and economy.”<sup>40</sup> Another Left leader, Sitaram Yechury, expressed concern that the nuclear deal amounted to capping India’s weaponization.<sup>41</sup>

The BJP similarly portrayed the deal as subjugating India to American interests, although it was a BJP government that had initiated the post-1998 test rapprochement with the U.S.

Congress policy also begs for an explanation. Why did the party choose to go to the brink on the nuclear issue, which had not been a major preoccupation of its governments in the past? We find that the deployment of three emotionally weighted tropes—sovereignty, security, and development—made the debate contentious.

### Sovereignty

Indian critics of the nuclear agreement with the U.S. alleged that New Delhi had accepted too many restrictions on its autonomous decision-making in exchange for the agreement’s payoffs. They claimed that the agreement granted the U.S. the right to restrict transfers of fissile material if India tested another nuclear device. This would amount to a codification of India’s voluntary moratorium on testing and would compromise the size and sophistication of its arsenal. The inspections resulting from the safeguards agreement with the IAEA were seen as further infringements on sovereignty. Responding to these concerns, Prime Minister Singh had assured the MPs that “if in their final form, the US legislation or the adopted NSG guidelines impose extraneous conditions on India, the government will draw the necessary conclusions, consistent with the commitments I have made to Parliament.”<sup>42</sup>

The invocation of sovereignty in the debate on the nuclear agreement was intensified by the 2006 statement by several retired scientists who claimed that the agreement would harm indigenous civil and military research and development.<sup>43</sup> More damagingly, certain scientists who had directed the 1998 tests

40. Rishi Raj and Anandita Singh Mankotia, “Left Links Wal-Mart to N-Deal,” *Financial Times*, September 4, 2007, <<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/left-links-walmart-to-ndeal/214360>>.

41. Anon., “Haste in Signing N-deal Can Prove Costly, Says Yechury,” *Tribune*, September 15, 2007.

42. Manmohan Singh, “Suo-motu Statement by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in Parliament on Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation with the United States,” *Hindu*, May 7, 2006, <<http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/nic/suomotuu.htm>>.

43. Anon., “‘Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal Infringes on Our Independence,’” Rediff, <<http://in.rediff.com/news/2006/aug/14ndeal.htm>>.

reignited the controversy over the recorded yields of the devices exploded, concluding that India needed further tests to maintain its nuclear deterrent.<sup>44</sup>

In response, the government presented the testimony of Anil Kakodkar, then chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, and R. Chidambaram, then principal scientific advisor to the government, as well as the revered ex-President Dr. Kalam.<sup>45</sup> These experts reassured the public that new tests were not required to maintain deterrent capabilities, and that safeguards would not hobble scientists. The need to highlight the approval of the scientists, we suggest, indicates the weakness of the political leadership on the nuclear issue.<sup>46</sup> The use of scientific expertise to make points in security debates is quite novel in India, and the reported friction between the technocratic lobby and politicians might prove decisive in the future.<sup>47</sup> Scientists can be said to have a sort of veto on this issue, although the actual preferences of those scientists still in service remain unclear. In this instance, retired scientists were better able to come out in opposition.<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately, three factors worked in favor of the Congress-led UPA on the sovereignty issue. First, the Left parties have always been less than credible on sovereignty issues because of their past internationalist stance. Second, the BJP lost credibility because it was the initiator of the negotiations with the U.S. Finally, the government was able to draw on scientific expertise to present its side of the story.

## Security

Security issues are closely linked to concerns about sovereignty. In this case, the security argument rested on the question of whether the agreement with the U.S. implied Indian participation in an American effort to contain China. Recall that, during the Cold War, the U.S. was portrayed by Indian security

44. R. Nolan, "India's Nuclear Liberation," Foreign Policy Association, <[http://www.fpa.org/topics\\_info2414/topics\\_info\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=433771](http://www.fpa.org/topics_info2414/topics_info_show.htm?doc_id=433771)>; S. Raghotam, "The Case for Nuclear Testing," RediffIndia, <<http://in.rediff.com/news/2007/may/15guest.htm>>.

45. Anon., "Kalam Says Pokhran-2 Was a Total Success," *Hindustan Times*, August 27, 2009, <<http://www.hindustantimes.com/News/india/Kalam-says-Pokhran-II-was-a-total-success/Article1-447667.aspx>>.

46. Mohan telephone interview.

47. Anon., "Mumbai vs. New Delhi," *Indian Express*, April 15, 2007.

48. Tellis interview; Karthika Sasikumar interview with A. Gopalakrishnan, former chairman, Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, Hyderabad, January 10, 2011; and Karthika Sasikumar interview with R. Rajaraman, professor emeritus, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, December 8, 2010.

analysts as a quasi-adversary. Some have claimed that the linkage between American strategy in Asia and the nuclear agreement triggered unreasoned anti-American reactions from the political class in New Delhi, accustomed to viewing the U.S. with suspicion.<sup>49</sup>

The security argument focused on the need for new tests, thus exposing the open-ended nature of the alleged guiding principle of Indian nuclear policy: “credible minimum deterrence.” Former BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee argued that the separation of civil and military facilities under the agreement would “deny [India] any flexibility in determining the size of our nuclear deterrent. Though we believe in a minimum credible deterrent, the size of the deterrent must be determined from time to time on the basis of our own threat perception. This is a judgment, which cannot be surrendered to anyone else.”<sup>50</sup>

On the security issue, the Left suffered from a lack of expertise and credibility, just as on the sovereignty issue. It was particularly vulnerable to accusations that its opposition was in the service of Chinese strategic goals.<sup>51</sup> Acknowledging this, Prakash Karat stated that it had been a tactical mistake to continue engaging with the ruling party rather than withdrawing support from the UPA at the outset, because the government was in a better position to shape the debate, owing to its greater credibility on these issues.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, the BJP was well positioned to win the security argument because of its image as the party of national security. However, despite its rhetorical advantage, the BJP was undermined from within by major figures of the party. First, former national security advisor under the BJP and prominent defense intellectual Brajesh Mishra, went on record supporting the deal, claiming that discussions with key scientists convinced him that it would not harm the nuclear program.<sup>53</sup> Another senior leader, Jaswant Singh, lost face when he

49. Karthika Sasikumar interview with Tarun Das, chief mentor, Confederation of Indian Industry, New Delhi, December 9, 2010; Mohan telephone interview; and Karthika Sasikumar interview with Venkatesh Varma, senior Indian diplomat, New Delhi, January 7, 2011.

50. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, “Statement by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the Joint Statement Signed by PM Manmohan Singh and President Bush,” BJP, July 2005, <[http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5169&catid=68:press-releases&Itemid=494](http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5169&catid=68:press-releases&Itemid=494)>.

51. C. Raja Mohan, “Delhi’s Comrades Slam India, Beijing’s Slam U.S. for N-deal,” *Indian Express*, November 4, 2005.

52. Prakash Karat interview.

53. “India Must Go Ahead with N-deal: Brajesh,” *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2008; “Sense of the Deal,” *Indian Express*, April 28, 2008, <<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/sense-of-the-deal/302378/>>.

could not substantiate his claim that a previous Congress administration had been infiltrated by a “mole,” bringing its nuclear decision-making under the control of the U.S.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the Shiv Sena, a core regional party ally of the BJP, stated: “Everyone should be supporting the [nuclear] deal. It is in India’s interest.”<sup>55</sup>

## Development

The rhetoric of economic development has been used to garner support for the nuclear program since its inception. The promise that nuclear energy would spur development was used in order to sell the nuclear deal to the attentive public. The first paragraph of the statement on the implementation of the India-U.S. agreement firmly situated the deal in the context of India’s energy supply for economic development and global recognition of that development: “The resumption of full civilian nuclear energy cooperation between India and the U.S. arose in the context of India’s requirement for adequate and affordable energy supplies to sustain its accelerating economic growth rate and as recognition of its growing technological prowess.”<sup>56</sup> This promise of development and its recognition was the backdrop of Singh’s prediction in Parliament, that “[t]he scope for cooperation in the energy related research will vastly expand. India will be able to join the international mainstream and occupy its rightful place among the top countries of the nuclear community. There would be a quantum jump in our energy generating capacity with a consequential impact on our GDP growth. It also ensures India’s participation as a full partner in cutting-edge multilateral scientific effort . . .”<sup>57</sup>

This “promise of development” was subsequently used as a catchphrase to garner support from the public. Union Minister Sriprakash Jaiswal said the country had to use nuclear technology in order to generate more power to

54. “Anand Sharma Takes on B.J.P., Advani on N-deal,” *Hindustan Times*, July 21, 2008.

55. “Another Fission in Times of N-war: Sena Says Deal in India’s Interest,” *Economic Times*, August 24, 2008.

56. “Implementation of the India-Joint Statement of July 18, 2005: India’s Separation Plan,” Council on Foreign Relations, July 25, 2008, <<http://www.cfr.org/india/implementation-india-united-states-joint-statement-july-18-2005-indias-separation-plan/p16861>>.

57. Manmohan Singh, “Suo-Motu Statement by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in Parliament on Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation with the United States,” *Hindu*, <<http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/nic/suomotuu.htm>>.

overcome shortages, step up economic growth, and eradicate poverty and unemployment.<sup>58</sup> Along the same lines, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi claimed that the nuclear deal would bring electricity to every village in India.<sup>59</sup> And, during the electoral campaign, slogans to this effect appeared: “You Decide: We Say Augment Power and Usher in Development; They Say Bring Down the Government and Seize Office” and “We Salute Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh for Placing National Interest above Office and Pursuing the Nuclear Deal.”<sup>60</sup>

Though the debate over the nuclear deal with the U.S. was unprecedentedly contentious, we suggest that such contention did not emerge from the specifics of the relationship between the U.S. and India outlined in the agreement itself. Rather, it originated in the deployment of the emotionally weighted terms of sovereignty, security, and development by the various political actors in the debate—a deployment encouraged by the coalition politics of numbers.

#### CONCLUSION: A TURNING POINT?

What implications can we draw from the above discussion for Indian nuclear policy and India’s politics more generally?

First, the domestic debate on the deal was unusual. Foreign policy has rarely been so hotly debated. The debate brought nuclear policy onto the public stage. It marked the first frontal clash between the recent developments of coalition government and policy formulation process, in a domain that had traditionally been a quasi-exclusive prerogative of the executive branch. Prakash Karat claimed that this was the first time that a foreign policy issue had taken center stage and that Indian politicians were not yet skilled in presenting such issues to the average voter.<sup>61</sup>

Now that the nuclear weapons program is out in the open and nuclear policy is on the political table, this type of domestic contention over foreign policy is likely to recur. As the controversy over the Nuclear Liability Bill—which sets out the legal framework for civilian nuclear trade with India—

58. Anon., “No Rethink on N-deal, Ready to Sacrifice Govt: Minister,” *RediffIndia*, October 8, 2007, <<http://in.rediff.com/news/2007/oct/08ndeal3.htm>>.

59. Anon., “Who Is R.S.S. Slave? Sonia Corners Advani Again,” *Hindu*, April 16, 2009.

60. Anon., “Suspense, Excitement, Drama. It Was All There,” *ibid.*, July 23, 2008.

61. Prakash Karat interview.

shows, nuclear issues are no longer the preserve of technocrats. However, we must be careful when extrapolating from this intense episode in Indian political history. Our analysis identifies the origins of the positions and contentious character of the debate in the specific coalition configuration of the 2005–08 period. We do not find evidence that the nuclear debate represented a battle of contending visions of Indian foreign policy.

One policy implication of our study is that India's negotiating partners will need to become more aware of the dynamics of internal politics. They may attempt to intervene by providing information and reassurance to the contending parties. Because the Bush administration was also facing an uphill battle in obtaining congressional approval for the agreement, American officials were loathe to admit that there was dissension in India over the wisdom of the deal. They preferred to claim that it was supported by a political consensus in both countries.<sup>62</sup>

A second implication is that scholars of Indian nuclear policy, and perhaps other international issues, will have to take domestic and state politics more seriously. In the past, scholars have noted a broad consensus on security policy, and nuclear policy was no exception.<sup>63</sup> The India-U.S. nuclear deal rattled that consensus for three reasons. First, the military nuclear program became an object of public negotiation rather than a semi-secret national treasure. Second, the negotiations involved the U.S., a partner that has always provoked sharp reactions in the Indian political class. Third, the growing national role of regional parties, combined with the formidable bargaining power acquired for the first time by the Left, led those parties to voice their concerns on issues where the Congress-dominated executive branch was most reluctant (or had not yet learned) to share decision-making.

Another set of implications relates to the scientific and technocratic elite and transparency. The official government line required the support of these elites to "sell" the deal to a domestic audience. Those scientists who dissented from the official line were subsequently marginalized.<sup>64</sup> As Jaswant Singh points out,

62. Nicholas Burns, "America's Strategic Opportunity with India," *Foreign Affairs* (November-December 2007), <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63016/r-nicholas-burns/americas-strategic-opportunity-with-india>>.

63. Deepa Ollapally, "Mixed Motives in India's Search for Nuclear Status," *Asian Survey* 41:6 (November/December 2001), pp. 925–42.

64. Gopalakrishnan interview; Karthika Sasikumar interview with P. K. Iyengar, former chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, Mumbai, January 6, 2011.

the civil service and technocrats in India are used to handling nuclear matters in absolute secrecy.<sup>65</sup> As India matures as a nuclear power, especially in the civilian sector, better communication is imperative not only to involve the political class but also to inform India's broader citizenry. Transparency becomes even more important as nuclear decision-making is penetrated by non-governmental entities, such as foreign corporations.

In both domestic and foreign policy, the central government of India must learn to deal with a fragmented polity where it no longer has unquestioned prerogatives. Liberalization and globalization have ended up empowering sub-national political actors such as India's regional and non-national parties—a process that has already been noted in the economic sphere. As Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph put it, New Delhi has changed from an interventionist, tutelary state of the License/Permit Raj era to a regulatory center of a federal market economy.<sup>66</sup> State governments have been provided with incentives to take an interest in the making of foreign economic policy.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear that domestic political considerations played a major role in the debate over the civil nuclear agreement between India and the U.S. The question arises: in what way did domestic politics matter? On what basis did parties choose their positions on the deal? We find little evidence that parties were guided by their ideologies, or by the hope that their stances on the deal would win them votes. Instead, we find that the goals of political actors were derived from their interests in the larger political game: for the Left, strengthening its position as pivotal member of the UPA coalition; for the BJP, performing the role of the institutional opposition party; and for the regional parties, bartering their support in return for a variety of concessions from the ruling Congress. The fact that the Congress-led UPA coalition government's survival came to be at stake in the resolution of the debate triggered the involvement of parties that were not traditionally interested in matters of foreign policy. The nuclear issue provided an opportunity for parties to advance goals and interests disconnected from the nuclear deal itself. We expect that in the future, should similar coalition configurations occur, other issues of foreign policy would be subjected to the pressures of domestic politics.

65. Jaswant Singh interview.

66. Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Iconization of Chandrababu: Sharing Sovereignty in India's Market Economy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36:18 (2001), pp. 1541–52.

67. Rob Jenkins, "India's States and the Making of Foreign Economic Policy: The Limits of the Constituent Diplomacy Paradigm," *Publius* 33:4 (2003), pp. 63–82.