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A LOOK AT THE CENTENNIAL CENTER FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Domestic Politics and Nuclear Negotiations

Dinshaw Mistry, *University of Cincinnati*

When are nuclear agreements successfully completed? Putnam's "two-level game" framework provides the best answer to this question—agreements are successfully concluded when their technical details can "win" domestic approval in the countries negotiating the agreement. This framework explains how Washington and New Delhi negotiated a nuclear agreement from 2005 to 2008. The two sides negotiated an agreement with low nonproliferation provisions on the principal technical issues. In particular, India only accepted limited safeguards on its nuclear facilities and limited restrictions on nuclear testing. In exchange, the United States agreed to recognize India's nuclear status, and to lift longstanding barriers to civilian nuclear trade with India that had resulted from India's remaining outside the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Domestic politics determined the shape of this agreement. In India, bureaucratic resistance from the nuclear establishment and political resistance from opposition parties in the legislature prevented the government—that lacked a legislative majority—from accepting any agreement with tough nonproliferation restraints. In the US, the agreement advanced for two reasons. First, bureaucratically, regional affairs and strategic affairs officials countered the position of nonproliferation officials who sought greater Indian nuclear restraints. Moreover, the senior-most US policymakers supported the broader foreign policy case for the agreement and allowed nonproliferation concessions to accommodate India. Second, legislative factors were also favorable: the Bush administration and lobby groups persuaded Congress to advance the agreement, albeit only after accepting some congressional conditions.

This framework offers useful insights for nuclear dialogues with Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea. US nonproliferation specialists have outlined some key features of a successful civilian nuclear agreement: it should reduce nuclear dangers; advance strategic ties with a negotiating partner or advance broader US geopolitical interests involving that country; and result in economic rewards for US industry. No short-term agreement with Pakistan could attain these objectives—and therefore the US foreign policy bureaucracy is unlikely to consider any agreement permitting civilian nuclear trade with Pakistan in the near term. Washington could still consider a partial agreement, whereby it supports Pakistan's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group in return for Pakistan signing the test ban treaty. Looking ahead, changes in Pakistan's domestic politics may induce greater nuclear restraints. In particular, national economic distress may influence Pakistan's military to restrain its nuclear advances and allocate scarce resources toward conventional forces. If Pakistan then agrees to end fissile material production, which is a key requirement to attain US bureaucratic and legislative support for any civilian nuclear agreement with Pakistan, the prospects for such an agreement will increase.

In the case of North Korea, a deal may be possible in the middle-term. Such a deal would proceed in phases, beginning with a nuclear freeze and ending with denuclearization in North Korea. In parallel, Washington and Pyongyang would pursue political and economic normalization; Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing would support the normalization process; and verification would be adequate to provide timely warning of suspicious nuclear activities that can be subject to further investigation. This type of deal could win approval in the US political system if two conditions are met. First, the administration must make the case to Congress that a deal with North Korea is a vital national security interest. Such an argument is not hard to make in the context of America's "pivot" to Asia, since North Korean nuclearization ranks among the topmost security concerns in East Asia. Second, key domestic actors such as the Department of Defense must support the deal—which they could if the deal is explained as a way of increasing security on the Korean peninsula.

In the case of Iran, a deal would involve the lifting of international sanctions in exchange for restraints on Iran's nuclear program, especially its uranium enrichment program. Restraints that keep Iran at least one year away from a nuclear breakout could win bureaucratic approval in the United States. Still, the administration must make a national interest case to increase congressional support for such a deal. And the deal could have domestic support in Tehran if its domestic costs—in terms of opposition from hardliners opposing any agreement with the United States—are offset by the benefits obtained from the lifting of international sanctions on Iran.

Dinshaw Mistry *is associate professor of political science at the University of Cincinnati, and author of* The US-India Nuclear Agreement: Diplomacy and Domestic Politics. *He spent an academic quarter at APSA's Centennial Center while pursuing research on this book. His stint at the Centennial Center allowed him to conduct interviews with policymakers in the Washington area; to interact with APSA's Congressional Research Fellows at the Centennial Center, and to obtain their feedback on the congressional aspects of the US-India agreement; and, based on these interviews and interactions, to strengthen the theoretical and empirical sections of the book. After the book's publication in the summer, 2014, he presented his findings in a panel discussion at the Woodrow Wilson Center—the panelists drew lessons from the US-India case for ongoing US nuclear negotiations with Iran and for possible future nuclear talks with Pakistan and North Korea. The panel discussion is summarized in this piece. He can be reached at dinshaw.mistry@uc.edu.*

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