The U.S.-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement: A controversial move

BY MARK L. MAIELLO

The act that puts the agreement into effect requires India to abide by IAEA safeguards, but not to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

When considering the security of nuclear technology, the double standard of dealing with allies differently from real or potential enemies is a dangerous tactic (Cirincione and Myers, 2006). Allies come and go. If India and Pakistan should launch a nuclear strike on each other, who do we back? If one or the other provokes countermeasures (Robichaud, 2006).

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By Mark L. Maiello is a radiation safety officer and a contributing editor to Health Physics News.
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a serious international crisis detrimental to U.S. concerns, will their status as allies be maintained? Is this a sound policy for viable international nuclear security?

Controlling the security of nuclear technology requires rigorous, agreed-upon inspection and accountability protocols that must be considered fair by all participants. India, like other minor nuclear weapons states such as Israel, Pakistan, and China, maintains its nuclear activities beneath a cloak of secrecy that will, at least for some period of time, restrict inspections (Robichaud, 2006). This is much less desirable than an inspection framework backed by multinational consensus as would be offered by a vigorous and supported NPT. The latter provides some reportability, transparency, and inclusion by all participants, with a concomitant assurance of international security. When secrets are maintained, insecurity increases. In the world of nuclear security and weapons proliferation, there should be one standard for all nations backed by a U.S. government that deals fairly and consistently and remains fully committed to the principles of the NPT.

On January 18, 2007, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved its famous “Doomsday Clock” from 7 minutes to 5 minutes before midnight, indicating that the risk of nuclear conflict has increased (BAS, 2007). We must now wait and see if the repercussions of the U.S.-India deal can help push the hands of the clock back by enhancing greater regional and, perhaps, worldwide security. For peaceful nuclear power, which continues its struggle to disengage itself in the minds of many from the military applications of the atom, the success of this civilian nuclear deal is crucial—but it is not assured.

References


