

'INDIA GAINED EXPONENTIALLY FROM U.S. NUCLEAR DEAL'

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

Shyam Saran Sushil Kumar Verma

India has gained exponentially from the Indo-U.S. civilian nuclear deal, said former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, at an event to mark 10 years since U.S. nuclear restrictions were lifted on India. He listed permanent access to nuclear fuel and a change in international perception as the biggest benefits for India since the U.S. Congress passed the deal in September 2008.

"Today we have long term agreements for fuel with at least a dozen countries. From being a target of technology denial regimes, and also [being targeted for nuclear] testing, we are now not a target. No one now objects when India conducts a missile test," said Mr. Saran, who was subsequently Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's special envoy and Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board.

Three errors

Speaking at the same function, organised by the Society for Policy Studies, former Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar said India's decision to go ahead with the civilian nuclear deal in 2008 was an effort to reverse "three strategic errors".

"There was the error of partition, where we lost our territory, the error of economics where many of the reforms of the 90s should have come earlier, and on the nuclear side, had we pushed our nuclear programme as consistently as China did in the 1950s, we could have made the Non Proliferation Treaty deadline."

Speaking about China's opposition in 2016 to India's membership application for the Nuclear Suppliers group (NSG), Mr. Saran said he didn't think it was "likely" that the membership would come through in the "near future," although, Mr. Jaishankar said he would "not rule it out," given geopolitical shifts that could change China's perceptions.

Cut-off date

The Nuclear Suppliers group had made 1967 the cut-off date for declaring nuclear powers, which India missed as it conducted its first nuclear test in 1974, which resulted in sanctions and cutting off of assistance from western countries. In 1998, after the Pokhran tests, India faced further sanctions, which led to many hardships, said Mr. Jaishankar, as he described the journey to 2005, when India and the U.S. signed a breakthrough defence framework agreement that changed the course of the relationships.

Both Mr. Saran and Mr. Jaishankar were part of the Indian diplomatic team that travelled to the U.S. in July 2008, and negotiated the contours of the agreement that would have to be cleared by the U.S. Congress where many opposed the George Bush plan to end nuclear restrictions on India and begin nuclear trade. "Our biggest problem was that a gentleman called Barack Obama posed the most difficulties about the deal and he was not even prepared to meet us," said Mr. Jaishankar, to laughs from the audience, as he described "killer amendments" that the former U.S. Senator, who later became U.S. President, tried to introduce.

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