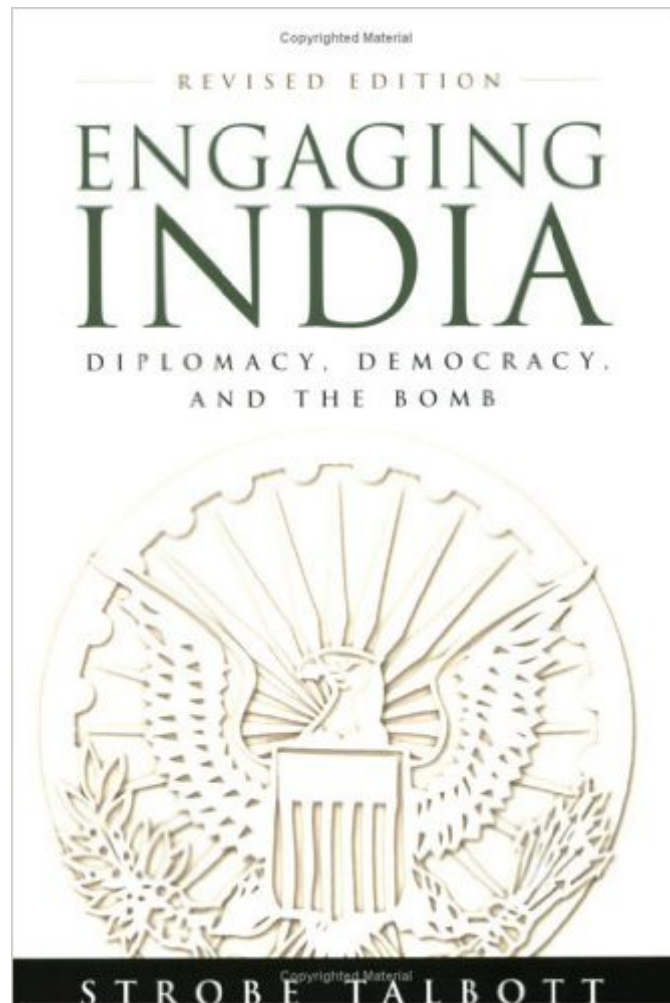


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Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, And The Bomb



Synopsis

In this revised edition of the highly praised *Engaging India*, Strobe Talbott updates his bestselling diplomatic account of America's parallel negotiations with India and Pakistan over nuclear proliferation in the late 1990s. The update looks at recent nuclear dealings between India and the United States, including Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 2005 visit to America. Under the highly controversial agreement that emerged, the United States would give India access to U.S. nuclear technology and conventional weapons systems. In exchange, India would place its civilian nuclear program under international monitoring and continue the ban on nuclear testing. Praise for the hardback edition "A fascinating study of how diplomatic dialogue can slowly broaden to include subtle considerations of the domestic politics and foreign policies of both countries involved." *Foreign Affairs* "An important addition to the literature of modern diplomatic history."#151;Choice "Detailed and revealing... an honest behind-the-scenes look at how countries make and defend policies.... A must-read for any student of diplomacy."#151;Outlook (India) "A rapidly engrossing work and a welcome addition to modern world history shelves."#151;Reviewer's Bookwatch "A highly engaging book; lucid, informative and at times, amusing."#151;International Affairs

Book Information

Paperback: 270 pages

Publisher: Brookings Institution Press; revised edition edition (March 6, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0815783019

ISBN-13: 978-0815783015

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (20 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #936,722 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #114 inÂ Books > History > Asia > Pakistan #264 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Arms Control #742 inÂ Books > Business & Money > Skills > Business Writing

Customer Reviews

Strobe Talbot's memoir begins in 1998 when the Vajpayee Government in India shocked the world by conducting the Pokran II nuclear tests. The State Department - Talbot's employer - learned about the tests from CNN, and the CIA learned about them from the State Department. (The CIA used to know things.) The foreign service officer in charge of the State Department's bureau of intelligence

and research wryly remarked, " It looks like we're all having a bad government day." Talbot was the Clinton's Administration's resident expert on Russian-affairs, but after the tests (Pakistan followed with nuclear tests two weeks later), he was immediately reassigned as the point person and crisis manager for South Asia. His assignment was to persuade India to limit the development and deployment of their nuclear weapons; this included the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Talbot and his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh met fourteen times over the last two and half years of the Clinton administration. This extended dialog between Talbot and Singh ended with Talbot's failure to persuade India to accept any restraints on its nuclear weapons program - which came as no surprise to either Talbot or Singh. The dialog -the engagement of India - brought many unintended benefits. Treaties such as the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the (CTBT) are, from an Indian perspective, discriminatory and condescending against everyone except the original five nuclear powers. The nuclear option was seen by the Vajpayee Government, and especially by the right-leaning nationalists of the Bharatiya Janata Party, as not only a realistic defense policy, but also a tool for achieving great power status. They never had any intention of signing the CTBT.

Clearly Mr. Talbott has a favorable opinion of India and that alone is, I suspect, music to many an Indian's ears. Having said that, this book made me realize how little, in terms of appreciation for India and its core values, I have come to expect out of American leaders and diplomats past and present alike. While Mr. Talbott faithfully presents all the Indian arguments against the NPT, he fails to acknowledge, in spite of his relative security in retirement from public office, that those arguments make sense to ANY fair and balanced person, not necessarily Indian. Mr. Talbott, rather conveniently, switches to his I-was-just-a-state-department-peon hat to steer clear of commentary about the discriminatory and seriously flawed NPT. In the absence of that basic acknowledgement, I am unable to take to heart any of his criticisms, however justified, about India's social structure and body politic. Mr. Talbott would have us believe that the "hyphenation" of India and Pakistan, that Jaswant Singh takes exception to, is a justifiable association rooted in common sense, while in fact, it is actually a result of a deliberate and successful cold war effort on the US State Department's part to equate the two countries. Does Mr Talbott expect us to believe that only the purest and most innocent of assessments led to the prevalent notion in much of the western media that India and Pakistan are somehow "rivals", when in fact India is 7 times as populous as Pakistan, has an economy almost 10 times that of Pakistan, and has a system of governance that couldn't contrast any more sharply against Pakistan's?

The scene that epitomises US India relationship best is narrated in this book. Jaswant Singh, India's Foreign Minister, steps in to meet Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State. As he enters, Albright gives him a dressing down. "You lied to us (about the bombs). Friends don't do that to each other". Jaswant Singh remains silent for a minute; takes his seat and says "Madame, there is a difference between a lie and a secret". This difference between an expectation and its infeasibility epitomizes the strains in the engagement. If the World is a country and the individual countries its citizens, the World is not a democracy. There is no one law for all countries. Some seem above/beyond the law. This line of reasoning and the feeling that if "others" have it, we should have it too forms the core of India's arguments for its bomb. The US is not trying to introduce NPT to bolster its power. The US is doing this to reduce the probability of rogue nations destroying civilization as we know it. Yet, it does not want to subject its own self to the regime it advocates for everyone else. Rejecting a cherished friend's conflicting view is difficult. Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh seem to have handled this well. Strobe Talbott gives an "inside the ring" view of the attempt to rope India into NPT and the human side of it. His friendship and regard for Jaswant Singh is visible in the book. Unfortunately, neither Strobe nor Jaswant, seem to reckon the public opinion in India that would eventually shape its policy. There are a billion Indians. They are not having the highest GDP per capita. But they have a habit of deciding what is right for them.

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