

Bush: No Nuclear Pact for Pakistan

President rejects giving Musharraf the same technology-sharing deal he gave India, but he praises joint efforts in the war on terrorism.

By Peter Wallsten,
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ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — President Bush praised Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Saturday as a "strong friend and ally" but said in no uncertain terms that his host's government would not receive the kind of landmark nuclear cooperation deal the U.S. struck last week with India, Pakistan's longtime rival.

Bush's comments, coming in a joint appearance designed to showcase U.S.-Pakistani cooperation in the fight against Al Qaeda, illustrated the international ripple effect of the U.S. decision to reverse decades of policy and permit sales of nuclear technology and fuels to India even though it has not signed the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Critics have charged that the agreement with New Delhi would prompt nations such as Pakistan to seek similar treatment and escalate their own weapons production. And, in fact, Musharraf raised the issue in private talks with Bush during the U.S. president's first visit to Pakistan, which was undertaken amid intense security measures.

With Musharraf at his side later, Bush said, "Pakistan and India are different countries, with different needs and different histories," presumably referring to Abdul Qadeer Khan, the former head of Pakistan's nuclear program who ran a black-market operation selling secrets and technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya.

The U.S. president's arm's-length courting of Musharraf, who came to power in a coup, and his deal with India exposed some of the uneasy compromises the Bush administration has made, analysts say. They contend that his actions appear to contradict the stated foreign policy agenda of spreading democracy, defeating "evil" and suppressing weapons of mass destruction. Although Bush describes his foreign policy as fueled by idealism, experts say, his trip to South Asia was a reality tour.

"President Bush should be commended for laying out a clear vision, but it's a tough and bumpy road between theory and practice," said Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "The hardest trade-off here is this: Do we support nondemocratic governments that are helpful on counter-terrorism, or do we support democratic processes that enable our foes to flourish?"

That question was the backdrop for Bush's 24-hour stay in Pakistan, where he sought a balance between hailing Islamabad's cooperation with fighting the U.S.-declared "war on terror" and lecturing Musharraf on democracy and his nation's tolerance of Islamic extremism.

Still, despite criticism in some circles that Musharraf has been slow on democratic reforms and allowed some extremists to find refuge in his country, Bush said repeatedly that counter-terrorism efforts remained the crux of their relationship.

"Part of my mission today was to determine whether or not [Musharraf] is as committed as he has been in the past to bringing these terrorists to justice, and he is," Bush said as the two men stood side by side. "He understands the stakes, he understands the responsibility, and he understands the need to make sure our strategy is able to defeat the enemy."

Bush also credited Musharraf with pushing for some reforms, such as empowering women and improving education, which in turn could reduce Islamic fundamentalism.

"We're talking about making sure that we work closely to bring the terrorists to justice, but in the long run he understands that extremism can be defeated by freedom and democracy and prosperity and better

education," Bush said. "And we spent a lot of time strategizing on that subject."

But two weeks ago, Bush said in a Washington speech that Pakistan had a "distance to travel on the road to democracy." And in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, this weekend, police detained cricket star turned politician Imran Khan and arrested dozens of his opposition party's supporters to block a rally protesting Bush's visit.

Saturday's stop marked the final leg of a five-day trip for Bush that began with a surprise visit to Afghanistan designed to promote its fledgling democracy, achieved after U.S.-led forces ousted the ruling Taliban in 2001.

The four-hour visit to Afghanistan reflected Bush's "freedom agenda," but even in Kabul, the capital, the symbolism was mixed. A U.S. intelligence official recently reported that pro-Taliban insurgent attacks are on the rise, and security was such a concern that the trip was kept secret until Bush was on the ground.

On Saturday in Islamabad, Bush declared his foreign tour a success, saying in his weekly radio address that U.S. ties with the three countries he visited would enhance security at home.

"By working with these leaders and the people of these three nations, we're seizing the opportunities this new century offers and helping to lay the foundations of peace and prosperity for generations to come," he said.

But in the two countries where he engaged in serious diplomacy, critics say, Bush was forced to compromise on key facets of the second-term foreign policy agenda laid out in his 2005 inaugural address, in which he pledged to make the world safer and work toward ending tyranny.

In the case of India, Bush took credit for persuading that country to open some of its nuclear reactors to international inspection for the first time — a move that Bush administration officials said would lead to fewer nuclear weapons. But critics were quick to argue that the U.S. reversed decades of precedent with the deal, which lifted the ban on sales of nuclear materials to a country that has refused to sign the nonproliferation treaty.

The deal, which requires the approval of Congress, would give India a final say over which reactors to open to inspection and which ones to declare secret military sites, where weapons could continue to be produced. The U.S. technology could be used only for civilian purposes.

Bush was eager to make the deal, analysts say, because he wants to pursue closer ties with India, which for decades was closer to the Soviet Union than the United States. U.S. firms stand to reap billions in profits from the deal, administration officials said, and the analysts have argued that an India that is strong and pro-U.S. could help balance the increasing military and economic might of China.

The deal also adds some gray into the usually black-and-white Bush foreign policy, some say.

"Foreign policy is always a trade-off among competing objectives," said Joseph S. Nye, a former dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and a former assistant Defense secretary in the Clinton administration. "While it is important to express values in foreign policy, the danger of letting the rhetoric become excessive is that it exposes us to corrosive charges of hypocrisy that undercut our soft or attractive power."

"I happen to agree with the trade-offs that Bush has made in the search for security on this trip," Nye added, "but wish he had thought more carefully about the rhetoric."

Bush also found time during his short trip to communicate more directly with locals, engaging in a kind of "photo op" diplomacy designed to soften a U.S. image that has suffered amid accusations of mistreatment of terrorism suspects.

In India, he was pictured inspecting produce and tilling a garden. And he delivered a prime-time speech there in which he declared India-U.S. relations closer than ever.

In Islamabad on Saturday, despite security precautions that put the city in lockdown and even forced him to fly in with the lights of Air Force One turned off, Bush found a TV-friendly activity: playing a bit of cricket, the baseball-like game that is the country's obsession.