The recently signed nuclear deal has catapulted Indo-US relations to a higher level. Under the historic agreement, India has agreed to classify 14 of its 22 nuclear facilities, after separating its civilian and military facilities, under permanent international supervision by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This would end a 30-year long moratorium on sales of nuclear fuel and reactor components by the US to India. The crucial question though is whether the US Congress would display the same enthusiasm in voting positively for the nuclear deal. The following factors will influence the Congressional decision.

First, the US lawmakers are expected to examine whether the Bush administration, in signing the agreement, has violated the Nuclear Non proliferation Treaty and examine its consequences in regard to United States policy on the issue with Iran and North Korea. As Senator Richard Lugar, one of the fiercest advocates of nuclear non-proliferation admitted 'India has never signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty". Lugar chairs the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee whose approval is imperative for the deal to move forward.

Second, the US lawmakers are aware that the agreement has managed to salvage for India future fast breeder reactors from IAEA inspection signalling a significant victory for India's ability to convince the United States of its 'sovereignty'. It is also believed that many reactors that India is exempting from international supervision, as well as its flexibility to isolate future breeder reactors from inspection, belies the Bush administration's claims that the agreement is a boon to the non-proliferation system

Third, the Congress is aware that voting in favour of the deal would mean voting for changes to US legislations. It would have to amend the Atomic energy act of 1954 to provide for an India-specific waiver to enable the country to get nuclear technology for its growing needs. Further their vote is likely to be influenced by the probability of success of the Bush administration in securing support from the 45 nation nuclear suppliers group. The NSG, which oversees nuclear transfers, must also change its rules. A majority in the group are said to be happy about the deal but China one of the key members has already voiced serious concerns.

Fourth, Right from the beginning the Congress has been critical of the Bush administration's reversal of decades-old US nuclear policy, pledging instead to move towards full nuclear cooperation with India, including the sale of reactors and fuel for India's civilian nuclear energy program. The mood turned in India's favour only in early January, 2006 when two delegations led by Senator John Kerry and Representative Bobby Jindal met with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, and voiced their support for the Indo-US nuclear deal.

Fifth, the Congress would be influenced by whether India can successfully separate its civilian and military facilities which are essential for the nuclear deal to go through. It will be assessing both the feasibility and credibility of the Indian plan by the testimony of its own experts. Meanwhile If India decides to proactively separate its civilian and military facilities then this would send a positive
signal to the US lawmakers that India is serious in being a responsible player in the nuclear market. This would pave the way for the Bush administration to push for a positive vote in the Congress.

Sixth, the Congress has also voiced its concern that the nuclear deal could lead to an arms race in the region. Pakistan which was left disappointed when its demand for a similar deal was rejected by the American President could look to strengthen its partnership with China in its pursuit for achieving parity with India. Similarly China would make an effort to increase its nuclear arsenal in order to negate the Indo-US nuclear deal.

The Indo-US nuclear deal has been placed before the Congress. It is expected that the Congress is likely to vote favourably for the deal as it would not like to be seen as posing an obstacle to a burgeoning US-India relations in an environment of unprecedented levels of cooperation. Yet, the whole process will be complicated and long drawn as the Congress will look to impose conditions before giving it a nod. Yet, it has also been firmly told that imposing conditions would tantamount to killing the deal. As Henry Hyde, chairman of the House international relations committee said in a statement released on 17 March, 2006 - "This is a complex agreement with profound implications for the US and global interests. Congress will need to take a closer look at its provisions in order to come to an informed decision."