



INDIA'S CONCERN OVER CHINA-PAKISTAN NUCLEAR NEXUS

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Since the inception of its nuclear programme, Pakistan has been getting the support of the Chinese Government. The A. Q. Khan episode made it clear to the world that Pakistan has not only got the necessary wherewithal from China and North Korea but also tried to illegally proliferate the nuclear weapons technology.ⁱ Such issues have been a matter of serious concern for India, which in former defence minister Jaswant Singh's words, is 'sandwiched between two nuclear powers'.ⁱⁱ India's External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid expressed concerns over strengthening China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation in September ahead of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's scheduled visit to Beijing in October 2013. While interacting with a group of Chinese journalists in New Delhi as a part of the first India-China media forum, he stated that one of India's concerns in China's relations with Pakistan is about the impact on nuclear-proliferation. Other issue remains China's assistance in building infrastructure in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). This is not the first time in the recent past that India has raised voice against China-Pakistan nuclear nexus. Indian leadership raised the issue during Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's maiden visit to India in May, 2013. However, the issue was sidelined by the Chinese side, explaining the nuclear cooperation is no more than an attempt to address Pakistan's energy crisis.

Indian concerns are not emerging out of the blue. In 2010, Beijing conceded financing the construction of two nuclear reactors at Chashma Nuclear Power Complex in Pakistan. Most recently in August 2013, the two countries signed contracts worth US\$ 9.6 billion for two reactors at the Karachi Coastal Nuclear Power Project. It is important to note that Nuclear

Suppliers' Group (NSG), to which China is a member since 2004, prohibits the supply of reactors to the countries that are not party to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). This deal is certainly a breach of NPT principles, to which China is a signatory and Pakistan is not. According to NSG guidelines, transfer of dual-use technology is a major contribution to a un-safeguarded nuclear fuel cycle or nuclear explosive activity. China's transfer of nuclear reactors to Pakistan has always been explained for the civilian purpose but these reactors are believed to provide dual-use technology that has been used to serve the purpose of enhancing Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.ⁱⁱⁱ

India and Pakistan relations are already dubious due to consistent cross-border attacks on the Indian Territory. The recent incident of a militant dressed in an Indian Army uniform attacking Indian policemen has flared-up tensions again. Amid rising tensions, China's consistent supply of nuclear technology to Pakistan has been spurring an arms race in the South Asian periphery. However, what raises maximum concern is Pakistan's 'first use' policy of nuclear weapons which is worrisome for India.

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is not a cause of concern for India alone; it is equally troublesome for the US. The US official reports hinted that Beijing is in a secretive process of modernising Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, which is estimated to have approximately 110 warheads. Pakistan is also trying to miniaturise its nuclear warheads for its tactical nuclear weapons, MIRVs and also for fitting them on cruise missiles and submarine launched missiles. It could be that China is assisting Pakistan in its nuclear warhead miniaturisation process. Nuclear proliferation in Pakistan will curb the US efforts to fight terrorism in South Asia, particularly after the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.^{iv} In addition, China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation is abating the non-proliferation regime around the world.

Interestingly, Pakistan's intensified nuclear cooperation with China is seemingly a retort to the India-US nuclear deal signed in 2008. China-Pakistan nuclear trade is also interpreted as an endeavour to resist acceptance of India as a powerful nuclear state by majority of the countries and also ensure nuclear weapons parity between India and Pakistan. Apparently, nuclear cooperation with China addresses Pakistan's evident two-fold anxieties: addressing the massive power shortage in the country and attaining (or at least attempting to attain) parity with India on the issue of civil and military nuclear programme.

It is no hidden fact that China had helped Pakistan in attaining nuclear capabilities, even though China has always denied playing any role in Pakistan's nuclear arsenal programme. In the present scenario, China-Pakistan nuclear nexus is the most undermining factor in the way of non-proliferation regime. It is unlikely that China will stop assisting Pakistan in its nuclear weapon program and abide by NPT rules.

Nonetheless, it is time for India to be upfront about the issues which might prove perilous if not efficiently dealt with. While this issue is likely to come up for discussion during Manmohan Singh's visit to Beijing in October 2013, it will serve India's interest to take the matter of escalating China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation on board unfailingly. However, these concerns can only be addressed diplomatically as any wrong move by India has the potential to derail India-China bilateral relations and give Pakistan another chance to take advantage of the differences between India and China. India needs to raise the issue at all forums through diplomatic channels to cap Pakistan's unlawful acquisition of nuclear capabilities.

Notes:

ⁱ For a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's nuclear programme, please refer Dr. Shalini Chawla (2012), *Nuclear Pakistan*, KW Publishers, New Delhi.

ⁱⁱ Jaswant Singh, 'Against Nuclear Apartheid' *Foreign Affairs*, September- October 1998.

ⁱⁱⁱ For further reference, please see Jasjit Singh (1998), *Nuclear India*, KW Publishers, New Delhi.

^{iv} Pakistan's Nuclear weapons arsenal may act as a deterrent against the US.