



## Sino-Pak Nuclear Nexus and India's Concerns

*Devki Nandan*

Research Associate, Centre for Air Power Studies

China's proposed nuclear deal with Pakistan has caused a stir in India-China relations. Ever since the United States has concluded a civil nuclear deal with India, Pakistan has been demanding a similar deal from the United States. But President Bush made it clear that Pakistan should not expect a civilian nuclear agreement like the one with India and he further said that the two rivals on the subcontinent could not be compared to each other. However, after the US rejected Pakistan's demand, China offered it to build two more reactors at the Chashma atomic complex in Punjab through its state run China National Nuclear Corporation. China has already built one reactor, the Chashma - 1 in Punjab and is building a second reactor, Chashma - 2. According to the "new" deal, China is lending Pakistan \$207 million to buy two more reactors, Chashma - 3 and Chashma-4.<sup>1</sup>

The current Chinese decision to sell two more nuclear reactors to Pakistan is a fundamental issue of nuclear proliferation which is a cause of concern to both India as well as the international community. Yet, surprisingly, it has not attracted much criticism from the international community. China has argued that the proposed nuclear deal with Pakistan does not violate any international agreement in general and NSG guidelines in particular because the deal had been struck between China and Pakistan before the former joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2004. Further, China has maintained that its desire to sell two reactors to Pakistan at Chashma in addition to the two that were contracted and approved by the NSG in 2004 is part of the country's pre-existing commitments and thus be exempted from the NSG ban on sales to non-NPT countries. But the NSG members, in a

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recently held plenary meeting in New Zealand, responded by noting that the Chinese side made no mention of a third and fourth reactor when they talked about the Chashma-1 and 2, when they joined the group. The US state department spokesperson has stated that the deal for two more reactors appeared to "extend beyond co-operation that was grandfathered when China was approved for membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group."<sup>2</sup>

It is a well established fact that Pakistan's nuclear program has been a direct result of Chinese clandestine assistance and it is beyond doubt that without Chinese help, Pakistan's nuclear program would not have been possible. China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation began in 1971 and China was the source of initial design information of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and assisted with the building of the latter's nuclear technology complex. In 1983 US intelligence agencies reported that China had transferred a complete nuclear weapon design to Pakistan, along with enough weapons grade uranium for two nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup> China is believed to have provided essential weapons-related nuclear aid directly to Pakistan, including the design of the nuclear device detonated in China's fourth nuclear test, uranium enrichment know-how, and quantities of weapons-usable highly enriched uranium sufficient for Pakistan to build two nuclear devices in the early 1980s.<sup>4</sup> The nuclear cooperation between the two countries was extended to cooperation in the field of ballistic missile development in the 1990s as a result of which China sold M-11 missiles to Pakistan. In addition, China also believed to supply Pakistan with 5000 ring magnets to Pakistan for its main plant to enrich uranium in

high speed gas centrifuges. Moreover, According to the disclosure of two US nuclear scientists, Thomas Reed and Danny Stillman in their book 'The Nuclear Express', Chinese even conducted the first nuclear test for Pakistan in 1990 at their Lop Nor test site.

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**Unstable Pakistan and Safety of Nuclear Weapons**

The growing instability in Pakistan has certainly raised doubts about the safety of its nuclear arsenal. There is a growing concern among the international community and particularly in India of Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling into the hands of extremist elements. Due to the increasing strength and assertiveness of the terrorist forces in Pakistan, the apprehension of Pakistan's nukes falling into their hands is not baseless. There are serious and well founded concerns about the safety of its nuclear arsenal and whether it could one day fall under the control of an army dominated by radical elements.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, if a radical political party with fundamental Islamic ideology and links with terrorist organization comes to power, there is a high probability of reaching Pakistan's nuclear material and technology in wrong hands in some form or the other. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stated in November 5, 2007 in an interview that, although then-President Musharraf claimed to be in firm control of the nuclear arsenal, she feared this control could weaken due to instability in the country.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Michael Krepon of the Henry L. Stimson Center has argued that "a prolonged period of turbulence and infighting among the country's President, Prime Minister, and Army Chief" could jeopardize the army's unity of command which "is essential for nuclear security."<sup>7</sup> According to a report by the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the US Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (2005), Al-Qaeda "had established contact with Pakistani scientists who discussed development of nuclear devices that would require hard to obtain materials like uranium to create a nuclear explosion."<sup>8</sup> In such a volatile situation, China's decision to provide Pakistan with more nuclear reactors and related technology would be akin to deteriorating the already grave security environment.

**China-Pakistan Nuclear Nexus: Aimed at India**

Pakistan's nuclear program is solely India-centric. The rationale for Pakistan acquiring nuclear weapon has been to neutralize India's

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conventional military superiority. From a Pakistani point of view, it became essential for it to have a nuclear program as it could not match for Indian conventional military capability. Their belief

strengthened after Pakistan's humiliating defeat in 1971 war. Its nuclear weapons program has been to deter India from employing its military power for punishment across the borders without risking a nuclear war. This explains Pakistan's objective of "first use." Hence, it was seen as a fool-proof doctrine on "offensive defense" articulated by the then Pakistan Army Chief, Gen Mirza Aslam Beg in September 1989 where the offence would apparently consist of terrorism and religious extremism and the defense would be provided by the threat of its nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan's change of behavior is quite evident after it tested its nuclear bomb in 1998. It has continued to pursue the strategy of proxy war through terrorism. Attack on the Indian Parliament in 2002, and very recently terrorist attack in Mumbai on 26/11 are some of the prominent examples of it. Pakistan believes that notwithstanding its conventional inferiority, the nuclear weapons provides the ultimate guarantee of its independence and physical integrity even as it pursues provocative and offensive revisionist policies. Keen to avoid a full-scale conventional conflict with India, but desirous of altering the status of Kashmir through a constant needling of India, Pakistan reckons this is possible through nuclear weapons.<sup>10</sup> Under these circumstances strengthening Pakistan's nuclear program is something which directly goes against India's interest. It will embolden Pakistan in its misadventures against India. Pakistan with its increased nuclear arsenal is likely to be more dangerous and difficult to deal with, as it would also augment its chances to use force to achieve its political objectives.

**China-Pakistan and Nuclear Proliferation**

The increasing cooperation between China and Pakistan in the nuclear and WMD sphere remains an area of grave concern for India. China and Pakistan have also been involved in nuclear proliferation on a large scale. China was instrumental in providing nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan has sold nuclear-weapons technology to North Korea, Libya, and Iran. All these three countries have had

proven clandestine nuclear linkages with China. It is not incorrect to say that Pakistan's missile capability is totally attributed to China. In fact, when China faced sanctions, the missiles were supplied to Pakistan through North Korea. Pakistan is also blocking negotiations on FMCT precisely to gain time to accumulate more fissionable material. According to analysis of satellite imagery by the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, Pakistan is greatly expanding its capacity to produce weapons-usable plutonium, as well as uranium.<sup>11</sup> This is hardly an appropriate time to signal acceptance of the peaceful nature of the Pakistan's nuclear program. It is in this context that the present proposed China-Pakistan nuclear deal is not being positively viewed in India. Moreover, it has been a policy of China to keep India entangled in disputes with Pakistan. China's strategy has been to contain India by strengthening Pakistan. China has continued to provide Pakistan not only with bombs but with latest missile technologies which would invariably enhance Pakistan's offensive capabilities against India.

#### Options before India

Unfortunately, India is not in a position to block the deal as it is not a member of the cartel; it is for the NSG to object to China's proposed deal with Pakistan. But the issue missed a serious discussion in the recently held NSG meeting in New Zealand at Christchurch. India has cautioned China that if it went ahead to conclude a nuclear deal with Pakistan, the relations between India and China will be affected. Though the US has opposed the deal, it is not likely to do much to stall its progress because of China's growing clout, interdependent nature of the economies of both the countries and the need of the Chinese support to reign in Iran's nuclear program, and this is evident by the initial US reaction to the China-Pakistan proposed deal. On the other hand, the United States would also not like to displease Pakistan given the latter's indispensable assistance to the US war in Afghanistan. Some of the countries are blaming the Indo-US civil nuclear deal for this development. In fact, the deal could be a double blow to India. Firstly, NSG may turn a blind

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eye to the proposed deal between China and Pakistan which actually was evident in recently held plenary session of the NSG in New Zealand and secondly, it is likely to place fresh restrictions on the sale of ENR technologies<sup>12</sup> Although much to the relief of India, the cartel could not take any concrete decision regarding the ENR technologies ban on non-NPT members in the recently held plenary session.

It would be utterly wrong and inappropriate to equate the deal concluded between India-US and the proposed one between China and Pakistan for three reasons. Firstly, the proliferation record of China and Pakistan cannot be compared with that of India. Secondly, the nuclear facilities of Pakistan are already under threat and doubts have been expressed about their safety and probability of Pakistan's nukes falling into terrorists hand can not be ruled out. Thirdly, civil nuclear deal between India and the US was announced on July 18, 2005 and was concluded only in late 2008. During this period the deal was debated fiercely in the Indian Parliament, in the US Congress and was subjected to amendment to domestic laws of the United States. Approval was taken from the NSG and an additional protocol was signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the international inspection. Above all, India separated its military and civilian nuclear facilities, putting the civilian facilities under perpetual IAEA safeguards for transparency purposes. However, when it comes to China-Pakistan nuclear deal, all these elements are evidently missing.

India is not opposed to the civil nuclear energy cooperation between China and Pakistan but the absence of transparency and proper international safeguards are definitely a deep concern. Despite China's assurance of placing the reactors under IAEA safeguards, India is certainly apprehensive given the past record of both the countries in terms of nuclear weapons and WMD proliferation. China has consistently supported Pakistan's nuclear and military programme to check Indian power. This deal is another sign of China's growing assertiveness in international affairs and its intentions to keep India at bay.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, India

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must closely monitor the development in this regard and channelize its diplomatic efforts to ensure that required safeguards are followed. India, as of now, has expressed its displeasure of the Chinese move in a very calculated and balanced way keeping in mind the importance of India-China relations. However, garnering support from the international community on the issue would not be a cakewalk for India owing to the Chinese growing clout in the present global strategic scenario.

### Notes

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4 Leslie H Gelb, "Pakistan Links Peril US-China Nuclear Pact," *The New York Times*, 22 June 1984, cited in Monika Chansoria, *Chinese Proliferation in Asia: US Response*, (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2009), p 65.

5 Jayadeva Ranade, "The Nuclear Triangle," *Indian Express*, 25 June 2010

6 Congressional Research Service report on Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues, 23 February 2010, p 11, at <http://www.fas.org/spp/crs/nuke/RL34248.pdf>

7 Ibid.

8 <http://www.wmd.gov/report/index.html>.

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10 Manpreet Sethi, *Nuclear Strategy: India's March towards Credible Deterrence*, (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2009), p 49.

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12 Siddharth Varadarajan, Indian Wary of NSG Double Blow, *The Hindu*, 21 June 2010.

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P-284, Arjan Path, Subroto Park, New Delhi 110010  
Tel: +91 11 25699130/32, Fax: +91 11 25682533

Editor: Ms Shalini Chawla e-mail: [shaluchawla@yahoo.com](mailto:shaluchawla@yahoo.com)

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