



## **WHY CHINA SHOULD SHOULDER GREATER RESPONSIBILITY OF NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION?**

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It is because of the nature of international nuclear politics that is mostly embedded in threat perceptions and mistrust that the possibility of cooperation between countries becomes limited. At least, in the realm of nuclear security, this stands true in the case of most countries. The structure of international politics as a self-help system undoubtedly raises the likelihood of antagonism amongst the players in the international community. History has proven, time and again, that no country has ever reacted congenially to the acquisition of nuclear capability by another. .

Meanwhile, endeavors to contain nation states from acquiring the destructive nuclear capability have manifested in a complex range of mechanisms collectively known as the nuclear non-proliferation regime. International efforts to promote the objectives of this regime have maintained a steady momentum from the time the nuclear weapons were first invented. Yet, there is no denying that present day non-proliferation challenges still remain effectively unaddressed. While on one hand, there may be emerging a sense of a progressive maturity in the perception of the states towards assuring nuclear security, the threat of acquisition of nuclear weapons by non-state actors and the probability of more states acquiring nuclear weapons capability persist.

During the Cold War, the responsibility of nuclear security rested largely upon the two superpowers. But, in the present nuclear age, which is characterized by nuclear multipolarity, the world order is increasingly dependent on the nuclear behavior of many more players. All of these must display responsibility if a catastrophe is to be avoided. However, the

US and Russia do recognize the special responsibility that they must shoulder since more than 90% of the global nuclear stockpile rests in their arsenals.

Beyond them, though, it is China, the country with the third largest arsenal, which is expected to demonstrate a more visible commitment towards the grand objective of nuclear non-proliferation in the future. Although the Chinese position on the maintenance of nuclear security, over the last few years has been echoed more prominently during the two Nuclear Security summits, nonetheless any real contribution towards the advancement of the ideals of nuclear non-proliferation regime is yet to be realized.

In fact, if China were to shoulder this responsibility, it would be a win-win situation for both China and the non-proliferation regime. Being proactive towards the nuclear non-proliferation responsibility, would China to deliver on its own commitment of, '*establishment of a new fair and just international order...prerequisite for realization of a nuclear weapons free world*'.<sup>i</sup> China also has long maintained a position of No First Use (NFU) of nuclear weapons and has urged all the nuclear weapons states to undertake the same pledge. Along with it China has officially called for universal, '*ratification of the CTBT as soon as possible*'<sup>ii</sup> Yet in practice, China has yet not ratified the treaty, even after more than a decade and a half it signed the treaty. The proliferation linkages of China –Pakistan nuclear and missile cooperation, as well with North Korea are well known. The gap between theory and practice in the Chinese nuclear non-proliferation commitment is indeed worrisome. As much as it raises suspicion about the Chinese commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, it also adds up to its image as a proliferator. As China 'rises' to power and stakes claim as a major international player, it has an opportunity to undo the damage it has already caused to non-proliferation by now establishing itself as a responsible stakeholder in the international non-proliferation regime.

Besides being an adherent to all non-proliferation treaties, one of the easiest ways for China to step up its participation in the non-proliferation regime would be through monetarily contributing to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). IAEA's effective functioning is dependent on voluntary funds by the member states. Over the last few years the issues dealing with lack of funds have come into the forefront.<sup>iii</sup> With the kind of economic growth that China has seen and its well endowed foreign exchange coffers today, it does find itself in a better position to push towards financially strengthening non-proliferation regime. This is also

important for China as it plans to exponentially expand its nuclear power programme in the near foreseeable future.<sup>iv</sup>

Another aspect of non-proliferation that China could contribute to is through its stated commitment to nuclear disarmament. Until now China has maintained that it would be able to participate in the process only when the nuclear arsenals of the USA and Russia have significantly declined. This has happened with the conclusion of the New START. China must now step up its own initiative in this regard since what it does would be consequential to further influence the future of nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Therefore, China ought to seek areas of cooperation in order to exhibit an earnest commitment towards strengthening the non-proliferation regime. This would mean coming forward and engaging in dialogue to foster transparency in its nuclear aspirations and also the strengthening of international verification regimes, which would augment the global non-proliferation regime.

It is an established view that the Chinese nuclear ambitions are shaped mainly by the American nuclear posture and vice-versa, howsoever indirect. This has implications for India. A greater clarity in the nuclear posture and ambitions of China would better convey its strategic intentions to New Delhi and help avoid friction. It would enable the two countries to take up collective initiatives in order to create common grounds of partnerships to maintain nuclear security. Cooperation on combating nuclear terrorism is one such area. Civilian nuclear cooperation, including on nuclear safety, especially after the Fukushima accident could be other platforms for the two countries

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<sup>i</sup> China's position on Nuclear Disarmament (2004), see official document Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China; <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjw/zzjg/jks/cjik/2622/t93539.htm>. Accessed on 25 September 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> "El Baradei Says Lack of Funds Threatens IAEA, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2008/09/29/uk-nuclear-iaea-idUKTRE48S2VU20080929>, accessed on 21 September 2013.

<sup>iv</sup> Recently at the IAEA's annual gathering in Vienna, the Chinese outline for its continuity towards the ambitious nuclear power development plans was revealed by the Chairman of Chinese Atomic Energy Authority. The PRC at present has about 28 nuclear power reactors under construction, largest number in the world. For details see <http://www.firstpost.com/world/china-india-indicate-ambitions-to-expand-nuclear-power-at-un-gathering-1122805.html> ; Accessed on 23 September 2013