



**THE PERILS OF 'PEACEFUL ATOMS': A REFLECTION ON
RECENT SINO-PAK NUCLEAR COOPERATION**

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Peaceful Atoms?

The signing of peaceful nuclear cooperation agreements (PNCA) between states is not new. The idea was popularized first by the US President Dwight D. Eisenhower through his “Atoms for Peace” programme in 1953. In subsequent years, more than two dozen countries have received civilian nuclear technology from the US under this assistance programme. Statistics suggest the high points of nuclear cooperation occurred between 1980-1995 when fifty-five nuclear cooperation agreements were signed. Furthermore, averages of twenty-six agreements reportedly were signed from 1945 to 2000 each year according to a recent study.¹

In a phenomenon that came to be known as ‘Revival of Nuclear Power’ (from the year 2000 onwards), countries from the Asian region such as Bangladesh and Vietnam have expressed their willingness to go ahead with nuclear power development for the first time. For this PNCA’s have been signed with Russia and France respectively. Also, India and China have already robust nuclear power development plans for future by concluding civilian nuclear cooperation agreements with the US, France, Russia, UK. Their nuclear power development had kicked off as early during the first nuclear age in the 1950s.

Prima facie, the recent Chinese PNCA with Pakistan only seems to be in line with the trend that had been long set by the enthusiasts of the peaceful atom. Especially, when, Pakistan too had initiated its nuclear power development with the help of US ‘Atoms for Peace’ in 1954. However, the Sino- Pak cooperation has raised many worrisome dimensions, not just for Indian security but also for the global non-proliferation regime on the whole.

Security, Geopolitics and the Good Faith Negotiation:

The dual use dilemma of the peaceful atom has always complicated the procedures under which peaceful nuclear cooperation is sought and provided. Not only is the supplier country expected to ensure non-proliferation guarantees from the recipient country to satiate the quest of checks by international regimes, the recipient must also satisfy all verification procedures applied by the IAEA safeguards regime. The fecundity of these verification and compliances also lies in a bonafide spirit of the bilateral PNCA towards the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

China as an emerging and responsible participant of the international order has somewhat failed to ensure as to how its cooperation with Pakistan would add to the global objective of nuclear non-proliferation. As a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) since 2004, China is required to share information on its nuclear transactions and exercise restraint on transferring nuclear technology to a non-NPT signatory. These NSG guidelines are not legally binding but crucial as they facilitate obligatory terms for a safe nuclear technology transaction.

This is the second time in a row in a span of less than one year that China would be selling nuclear technology to Pakistan. It is noteworthy that previous Sino-Pak reactor deal (*Chashma-I* and II) as China claimed grandfathered in 1990s (before its NSG membership) was met by some disconcertment from the NSG and the waiver was denied in 2012. Despite the disapproval, China not only went ahead with the deal but concluded another nuclear cooperation agreement with Pakistan for its Karachi Nuclear Power Plant (KANUPP-II), which would likely to be operational in seven years. The Chinese defiance of NSG implies a defiance of a non-proliferation commitment of not one but 46 member nations are appalling.

Moreover, Pakistan does not qualify for nuclear commerce due to its proliferation linkages to Iran, North Korea and Libya. This must be viewed in the light of the fact that unlike India Pakistan does not have its nuclear programme distinguished into civilian and military. It may also be recalled that in 2006-2007 end user provision of the NSG guidelines was manipulated in the China-Pak nuclear deal for *Chashma* nuclear power plant (CNUPP-II).

In the coming few days on 08 December 2013 the very 'Atoms for Peace' speech of President Eisenhower that promoted the idea of a peaceful nuclear cooperation worldwide would complete 60 years. The IAEA also called as the 'Atoms for Peace Agency' responsible for the state's compliance of the NPT is already more than 55 years old. One can observe a satirically impeccable timing of the announcement of KANUPP-II and the 60th anniversary of a speech that symbolizes prevention of the diversion of peaceful atoms into military one. Interestingly; this irony gets the spotlight even more as the IAEA would be monitoring the KANUPP-II and needless to point out that has not officially expressed disagreement over the Sino-Pak defiance of the NSG guidelines. It is important to bring to attention that the NSG and IAEA work closely on preventing nuclear proliferation. The trigger list that forms the basis of NSG's export control guidelines were approved by the IAEA in 1978.

NSG members in this respect could be viewed as one of the guardians of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The NSG waiver was provided to India after three years of intense negotiations, such that any future Indian nuclear commerce transaction could materialise. In-fact the NSG emerged as a reaction to the Indian PNE (1974). There is a diametrically opposite treatment of Indian and Pakistani development of their nuclear ambitions.

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China, on the other hand, has killed two birds with a same stone through this nuclear cooperation. First, it has raised a Pakistani strategic counterweight against India in the realm of nuclear diplomacy by robustly cementing 'all weather' friendship. Secondly, It has sent a signal to the US led non-proliferation regime that how subtly and effortlessly non-proliferation guidelines that prevent any country from taking a certain step could be maneuvered for 'realpolitik'. All this when, last year (2012) NSG in its plenary session considered further strengthening its export guidelines.

For the United States; burning questions have been raised as France too is willing to sign a similar agreement with Pakistan. If that happens without an NSG waiver, then the US would have to answer not just to India but to oneself as to how was all the effort towards an NSG

waiver for US-India PNCA was at justified. A sincere belief in Pakistan's non-proliferation commitment by the US must also be made evident openly. One must note here that a recent report by a US think-tank named Pakistan as under the list of countries that are of concern for future as illicit nuclear trade suppliers.ⁱⁱ

In any case; the non-proliferation lobbies in the US must prepare to answer questions; when North Korea might want to ask for a similar nuclear cooperation as it too is an energy deficient country and the need for it to have nuclear energy might be more than Pakistan.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

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ⁱMathew Furchmann,(2012), "Atomic Assistance: How Atoms For Peace Programs Cause Nuclear Insecurity", Cornell University Press, London.

ⁱⁱ Andrea Stricker and Houston WoodFuture, (2013), World of Illicit Nuclear Trade :Mitigating the Threat, * pp. 10, see figure iii. Institute for Science International Security Report available at <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/future-world-of-illicit-nuclear-trade-mitigating-the-threat/>