

Why the U.S. cannot ignore Pakistan

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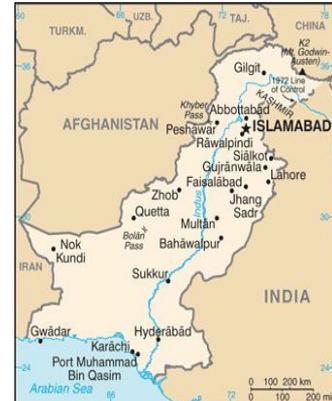
Introduction

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan will be undoubtedly greeted by many as an opportunity to break with that troublesome and often frustrating ally, Pakistan.¹

Such a reaction would be a mistake. Pakistan remains extremely relevant in the U.S. strategic calculus. As a nuclear weapon state outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Pakistan requires the continued attention of U.S. policymakers.

In brief:

- *Pakistan will continue to pose a serious proliferation threat due to its questionable ability to maintain a robust security environment over the long-term.*
- *Guns, gates, and guards alone cannot fully address the risks associated with the growing nuclear program of Pakistan.*
- *Rather walking away from Pakistan after the Afghanistan drawdown, the U.S. must continue to engage Pakistan to address nuclear security risks.*



Background: Pakistan's Nuclear History

Pakistan's civil nuclear program began in 1954 under the U.S. Atoms for Peace program. After three wars with India, including a disastrous conflict in which Pakistan lost its eastern territory and half its population, Pakistan established a nuclear weapons program. The decision to pursue nuclear weapons was further solidified by India's first nuclear test in 1974.

Pakistan's nuclear weapons program was greatly bolstered by the clandestine procurement network of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the director of Pakistan's uranium enrichment program;²

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technical and material assistance from China and North Korea; and possible financing from countries such as Libya and Saudi Arabia.³

Kahn has claimed that his lab was capable of detonating a nuclear device in 1984 and a 1986 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate stated that Pakistan was only “two screwdriver turns” from assembling a weapon.⁴ It was not until 1994, however, that Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced Pakistan’s possession of a nuclear bomb.⁵

In May 1998, India conducted its second nuclear test. Pakistan responded two weeks later with its own test of six nuclear devices.

Timeline of Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapon Development

- 1956 - The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) was established to participate in the Atoms for Peace program.⁶
- 1972 - Zulfikar Ali Bhutto established Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program.⁷
- 1976 - The construction of the Kahuta Research Laboratories uranium enrichment facility began.⁸
- 1978 - Pakistan’s first nuclear weapon design was completed.⁹
- 1980 - Pakistan announced the ability to fabricate nuclear fuel from domestic uranium.¹⁰
- 1983 - The first cold test of a nuclear weapon was conducted.¹¹
- 1985 - Pakistan crossed the threshold of weapons-grade uranium production.¹²
- 1992 - Foreign Secretary Shahryar Khan confirmed that Pakistan had the components necessary to construct at least one nuclear weapon¹³
- 1994 - Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced Pakistan’s possession of a nuclear bomb.
- 1998 – Pakistan conducted 6 nuclear tests.

Pakistan’s Nuclear Threats

Since the 1998 tests, concerns over Pakistan’s nuclear program have increased. The 1999 Kargil and the 2002 conflict at the Line of Control highlighted the devastating potential of the South Asian arms race and future conflict escalation. These concerns were overshadowed, however, by confirmation of the A.Q. Khan proliferation network in 2003.¹⁴

The revelation of the wide-reaching network not only elevated international suspicions of Pakistan’s nuclear

program but also has irrevocably altered the international security landscape.¹⁵ The Kahn network is no longer believed to be operating, but the threats posed by Pakistan's nuclear program continue.

Nuclear Security

Following the events of September 11, 2001 and the confirmation of the A.Q. Kahn network, Islamabad took a number of steps to increase international confidence in the security of its nuclear program. However, while Pakistan takes nuclear security seriously, its first priority is to protect its nuclear stocks from Indian strikes or U.S. seizure.¹⁶



Pakistan's nuclear security efforts possibly include features such as the storage of dummy and separated, or "de-mated," nuclear warheads. Information regarding de-mating of warheads, however, has been varied and contradictory. A 2001 Department of Defense report noted that Pakistan's nuclear weapons "are probably stored in component form," suggesting separation.¹⁷ Yet, Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (SPD) has never confirmed the warheads are de-mated and one former SPD officer has denied that warheads are stored in dissembled form.¹⁸

Pakistan also appears to have added a security feature to their nuclear warheads requiring the entry of an alphanumeric code to arm each weapon. While the incorporation of use-control safeguards is an important safety measure, codes are generally assigned to large groups of weapons and therefore susceptible to exposure and bypasses.¹⁹

Other Pakistani initiatives include strengthened export controls, the implementation of a National Security Action Plan with the IAEA's assistance, and involvement in international nuclear security programs such as the U.S. and Russian-led Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.²⁰

Since 2001, the United States has assisted Pakistan with improving its nuclear security by providing approximately \$100 million in aid for equipment and training.²¹ Pakistani officials have frequently argued that their nuclear weapons are secure and that they adhere to the norms of the nonproliferation regime.²² U.S. Officials such as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, as well as the U.S. State Department and the President have all expressed confidence in Pakistan's nuclear security.²³

However, terrorist groups have frequently targeted major Pakistan military facilities. While Pakistani and U.S. officials have insisted that terrorists have never endangered the nuclear arsenal, these assaults highlight the operational capacity and the threat these groups pose. Given the proximity of numerous terrorist groups and suspected links to the Pakistani state, Pakistan's nuclear assets certainly remain vulnerable.²⁴

Proliferation

Proliferation networks emanating from Pakistan have significantly contributed to the illicit spread of nuclear technology and knowledge. While the U.S. State Department has officially described the A.Q. Kahn network as “defunct,” the potential for proliferation continues.²⁵ A 2007 International Institute for Strategic Studies report noted that “at least some of Khan’s associates appear to have escaped law enforcement attention and could...resume their black-market business.”²⁶ Furthermore, there is evidence that Pakistani nuclear scientists not associated with the Khan network have met with members of al-Qaeda.²⁷

Instability in Pakistan’s governing institutions contributes to the proliferation risk. Further weakening of the state could facilitate the theft of radiological, non-fissile nuclear material, or even fissile material from Pakistani facilities.²⁸

The Nuclear Threat Initiative’s 2012 Nuclear Material Security Index ranked Pakistan second to last in an overall ranking of security for weapon-useable nuclear materials. This ranking was based on several factors such as the continued production of nuclear materials, political instability, corruption, and the presence of capable groups interested in illicitly acquiring weapons-usable nuclear materials.²⁹

Pakistan will continue to pose a serious proliferation threat due to its questionable ability to maintain a robust security environment over the long-term given its weak state: a factor that magnifies the financial and ideological incentives for proliferators.

An Expanding Nuclear Program

Pakistan is planning the expansion of its civil nuclear program and continues to dramatically increase its capability to produce fissile material.³⁰ Currently, two new plutonium production reactors and a new reprocessing facility are under construction. Pakistan is also working to finalize an agreement with Beijing for the construction of a third reactor.³¹

While exact intelligence on the size and scope of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal remains elusive, there are definitive signs that it is expanding and diversifying. As of 2010, Pakistan had sufficient fissile material for between 160 to 240 warheads.³² Once the reactors and reprocessing facility under construction are completed, Pakistan will have the capability to increase its weapon stock by 13-27 warheads annually.³³

In addition to the three new ballistic missiles and two new cruise missiles currently under development, Pakistan’s military has recently alluded to the further expansion of their nuclear forces. Pakistan is expanding its arsenal of short-range tactical nuclear missiles, as shown by recent missile tests: four out of the five missile tests since April 2012 have involved short-range tactical weapon systems.³⁴ Tactical nuclear weapons, being smaller, mobile, and generally forward deployed in less robust security environments, are more vulnerable to theft or loss.

Pakistan’s expanding nuclear arsenal, from the number of facilities to the amount of fissile material to the number and type of warheads and delivery vehicles, has serious proliferation implications.

Conflict escalation

As serious as concerns of state failure and terrorist theft may be, the probable threat, and therefore possibly more serious, is the threat that Pakistan's nuclear weapons pose during conflict escalation with India.

Islamabad's policies to develop its nuclear infrastructure, expand nuclear weapon stockpiles, and build and diversify its nuclear weapon systems are driven by the India-Pakistan rivalry.³⁵

Recent military developments such as India's establishment of a nuclear triad with the pending deployment of the *INS Arihant* and plans to create a ballistic missile defense system provide Pakistan with justification for its expanding nuclear program and nuclear posture changes.

Some analysts have argued that India's increased military capabilities could result in Islamabad lowering its threshold for using nuclear weapons.³⁶ This is evident by Pakistan's development of nuclear-capable tactical ballistic missiles. The addition of tactical weapons to Pakistan's arsenal suggests that the SPD believes a counterforce nuclear strike is possible without cascading nuclear responses. Additionally, the inherent ambiguity of dual-capable delivery systems adds a further destabilizing element to the mix.

With the unabated arms race in South Asia the likelihood of conflict escalating to nuclear exchange is real. However, this is not the only fear. The period of time before a crisis turns "critical" could potentially expose additional vulnerabilities to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

The movement of components for the mating of weapons or the deployment of mobile systems places the control of nuclear assets in the hands of lower-level officers in a high-alert scenario where normal security measures could be suspended. It is also conceivable that authorization codes could be released as contingency against communication breakdown.³⁷

*Under the stressed conditions of conflict escalation, Pakistan's weapons would be more vulnerable to theft, accident, or unauthorized use.*³⁸

Next Steps

Islamabad has taken numerous steps to reduce the vulnerabilities of its nuclear arsenal. However, guns, gates and guards alone cannot fully address the risks associated with a growing nuclear program.

This is especially true for Pakistan, a state that is simultaneously participating in an arms race while confronting domestic terrorism and economic, social, and political instability.



It is imperative that Washington continues to work with Islamabad to address the vulnerabilities of its nuclear program. Practical steps include:

- **Improving governance**

Long-term security requires efforts to ensure the viability of the state. Policies promoting good governance, rule of law, education reform, and economic growth are essential to this goal.

- **Counterterrorism efforts**

Analysts have noted that existing security measures appear to provide sufficient protection against most threats.³⁹ Yet, continued counter-terrorism cooperation is necessary to curb the growth of violence, guard against infiltration, and protect the state from the long-term repercussions of radicalism.

- **Nuclear security aid**

Washington should continue to provide essential equipment and training to protect Pakistan's nuclear facilities and promote the use of best practices and technical measures. Other forms of assistance such as redirection programs for retired scientists are a vital hedge against the risk of future proliferation.⁴⁰

- **International cooperation**

Islamabad has expressed interest in opening an international nuclear security training center.⁴¹ Cooperation in this endeavor would help integrate Pakistani scientists with international colleagues and increase Pakistan's stake in the global nonproliferation regime.

- **Nonproliferation conventions**

The U.S. should encourage Pakistan to endorse the Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, and possibly provide legal assistance to bring Pakistani law into compliance with the treaties.

- **Additional Protocol**

While Pakistan's endorsement of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty are essential to the future stability of South Asia, Washington should focus its efforts on urging Islamabad's adoption of the IAEA's Additional Protocol. This safeguard measure would bring Pakistan's program more inline with nonproliferation norms and add another layer of protection to its civilian energy program.

- **Regional context**

Finally, U.S. policymakers need to remain cognizant of the impact military sales and technological cooperation in South Asia have on regional stability and subsequently on Pakistan's nuclear program.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship is laden with complications. Washington's frustrations have mounted from issues such as the A.Q. Kahn network to Osama bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad to the conflict over NATO supply routes. On the other side, reports of U.S. plans to seize control of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, drone strikes, and the U.S. nuclear cooperation with India have deepened Pakistan's suspicions of the U.S.

Following the Soviet withdraw from Afghanistan, a reassessment of the U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership led to the U.S. severely cutting aid to Pakistan. The drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan should be seen as an opportunity to reform the U.S.-Pakistan partnership, not a pretext to allow it to crumble.

It is no surprise that in this time of fiscal constraint some U.S. lawmakers are considering cutting or otherwise restricting aid to Pakistan. However, there is a limit to what financial incentives and disincentives can achieve.

When developing a more effective Pakistan policy, U.S. decision-makers must keep in mind that Washington and Islamabad have differing and even conflicting strategic viewpoints. The U.S. must continue to seek ways to build trust while countering misperceptions.⁴²

In the frustrating, complex process of working with Pakistan, it is tempting to simply walk away, writing Pakistan off as rogue state. This would be a mistake. National security demands the U.S. continue to engage Pakistan to address these nuclear threats.

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Building a New American Arsenal

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Gone are the days when a nation's strength could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires a New American Arsenal harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

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