



Executive Memorandum

No. 532

June 16, 1998

THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S NUCLEAR AID TO PAKISTAN

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China's role in helping Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons has raised serious concerns about China's part in fostering instability in South Asia. The disturbing strategic implications spill over even to the Middle East. It is essential that policymakers in the United States examine these implications carefully in order to craft an effective response.

CHINA'S NUCLEAR AND MISSILE PROLIFERATION

Since the 1970s, China has been instrumental in Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. China provided Pakistan with highly enriched uranium, ring magnets necessary for processing the uranium, and education for nuclear engineers. Pakistan's nuclear bomb, in fact, is widely believed to be based on Chinese blueprints. Worse, in 1990 and 1992, China provided Pakistan with nuclear-capable M-11 missiles that have a range of 186 miles. China reportedly has provided the technology for Pakistan to build a missile that could strike targets within a 360-mile range.

Outside the region, and of perhaps greater immediate significance to the United States, China has been assisting Middle Eastern states with missile and nuclear programs. In 1988, China sold Saudi Arabia 50 to 60 1,200-mile-range DF-3 missiles. China has provided ballistic missile technology to Iran as well as other lethal technologies. In 1996, Iran received China's 72-mile-range C-802 antiship missiles, which is a threat to U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf and potential source of know-how for building longer-range cruise missiles. China also is believed to have given Iran

technology that could help that country's nuclear weapons program.

THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The strategic implications of China's nuclear proliferation are very troubling. They include:

1. **A New South Asian Arms Race.** A dangerously destabilizing arms race is developing among India, Pakistan, and China. China's deep involvement with Pakistan's nuclear program contributed to the new Indian government's decision to test nuclear weapons last month. Greater anxiety about China may convince India to build more nuclear weapons than it would need if its primary concern were Pakistan alone. A buildup by India could prompt China to do likewise to restore its relative superiority, increasing the likelihood of an upwardly spiraling arms race.

Produced by
The Kathryn
and Shelby Cullom Davis
International Studies Center

Published by
The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C.
20002-4999
(202) 546-4400
<http://www.heritage.org>



2. Possible Nuclear War in South Asia. By promoting a new nuclear arms race, China has helped increase the risks of nuclear war in South Asia. Pakistan is much poorer than India, and its air and ground forces are smaller. It is unlikely that Pakistan could match India's expenditures for nuclear and missile weapons. Because India will continue to grow in strength relative to Pakistan, there may be pressure for Pakistan to strike sooner. India is aware of this possibility and is likely to choose to put its nuclear forces in a hair-trigger, "use-them-or-lose-them" posture. India and Pakistan, moreover, are inexperienced in nuclear operations and have no developed nuclear doctrines. Add to this volatile mix the highly emotional religious, cultural, and national differences that have divided India and Pakistan since their founding. War could begin over the long-disputed province of Kashmir, and could escalate rapidly from a conventional conflict to an actual nuclear exchange.

3. Spreading Nuclear Instability to the Middle East. By helping Pakistan's nuclear program, China has spread instability outside of South Asia. To its credit, Pakistan thus far has expressed no inclination to proliferate nuclear technology further. But the praise for Pakistan's nuclear achievement by radical Islamic leaders highlights fears of more "Islamic bombs." For example, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, spiritual leader of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, hailed Pakistan's nuclear tests as an "asset to the Arab and Muslim nations." Iran's foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, praised Pakistan's weapons achievement as a potential deterrent to Israel's presumed nuclear capability, and went on to say, "From all over the world, Muslims are happy that Pakistan has this capability." And Sheik Hayyan Idrisi of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque went so far as to proclaim that "The Pakistani nuclear bomb is the beginning of the resurgence of Islamic power."

4. More threats to, and less diplomatic leverage for, the United States. China's role in the new South Asian nuclear missile arms race creates potential dangers for the United States in the Middle East and Asia. A nuclear

attack on Pakistan, for example, would energize radical Muslims, and very likely would spur the nuclear weapon programs of Iran and Libya. In an attempt to counter Iran and build influence with China, Saudi Arabia may decide to buy new Chinese ballistic or cruise missiles to replace its aging, Chinese-made DF-3 missiles. This could undermine U.S. strategic leverage with Saudi Arabia. In Asia, China may be prompted to develop new and more accurate missiles to target India's nuclear facilities and missile forces. These new Chinese missiles also could threaten U.S. forces in Asia, as well as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Ultimately, China's desire for more accurate regional missiles could lead to its building more accurate intercontinental missiles. With these long-range missiles in its arsenal, China might consider shifting its strategic doctrine from one of nuclear retaliation against cities with a small missile force to one that targets a larger number of military targets in the United States. The United States lacks missile defense systems to protect itself, its allies, or its friends.

CONCLUSION

In the run-up to the June Sino-U.S. summit, the Clinton Administration has promoted the notion of a "strategic partnership" between China and the United States. China's irresponsible assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs, however, defeats the promise of any such partnership. To the contrary, China's nuclear and missile aid to Pakistan has ratcheted up tensions across the sub-continent, sparked a dangerous arms race, and increased the prospect of a nuclear war. At the summit, President Clinton should tell China's leaders that a successful "partnership" with the United States will require that they now reverse the dangers they helped to create. President Clinton also should declare that China's nuclear and missile proliferation requires that the United States build a missile defense system that will protect Americans and help to make nuclear missiles obsolete.

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