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U.S. Should Press China to Abide by NSG Rules on Pakistani Nuclear Cooperation

Lisa Curtis

China has agreed to provide Pakistan two new civil nuclear reactors, even though the U.S. and other countries have told the Chinese that the sale would violate its Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) commitments. This action indicates that China is uninterested in working with the U.S. to promote stability in the subcontinent and instead is focused on supporting its historical ally against neighboring India.

The U.S. should work with other NSG members to convince China to halt the transfer until Islamabad can assure the international community that its nuclear programs are safe and secure. Given that Pakistan is home to a plethora of extremist groups and has a track record of proliferating nuclear technology to other countries, the U.S. should be clear that the Chinese sale of additional civil nuclear technology to Pakistan without proper international safeguards is a risk to regional stability and security.

Boosting Pakistan's Nuclear Capabilities. The deal would mark the first foreign sale of this type of indigenous Chinese reactor, which has a 1,100 megawatt capacity. The two reactors are slated to be constructed near Karachi and expected to cost around \$9.6 billion. The China National Nuclear

Corporation signed contracts with subcontractors in August to build the plant on a turnkey basis. Beijing will reportedly provide 80 percent of the financing through a soft loan.

Pakistan already has three operating nuclear power plants. One is located near Karachi and two others are located at the Chasma site in Punjab. China is in the process of building two additional 350-megawatt reactors at the Chasma location (Chasma-III and Chasma-IV) that are scheduled to come on line by 2016.

Pakistan's nuclear weapons arsenal now exceeds 100 warheads. Its military doctrine has recently added short-range, tactical nuclear weapons as a way to counter India's conventional military advantages. Pakistan's ambitious nuclear goals are raising concern about an accelerated nuclear arms race in the region, which has already seen two major military crises in the last 15 years.

The Chinese likely feel emboldened to move ahead with further sales of nuclear reactors to Pakistan since the Obama Administration has taken a generally low-key approach in the past to such deals. In 2010, for example, when the Chinese indicated their intention to move forward with the Chasma-III and Chasma-IV projects, a senior State Department official said the U.S. was merely "studying" the proposal. At that time, U.S. officials appeared to hope that their acquiescence would placate both China and Pakistan over the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal.

The U.S. soft stance on the previous deal makes it more difficult to argue against the current sale. China says that its nuclear cooperation with Pakistan is limited to peaceful purposes and falls within international safeguards as determined by the

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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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International Atomic Energy Agency. But as a member of the 48-nation NSG, China has committed to refrain from exporting civilian nuclear technology and equipment to any country that is not a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Civil nuclear technology and facilities can be used to support weapons programs in various ways, including for plutonium production, diverting or extracting highly enriched uranium from spent fuel, or development of expertise for use in developing nuclear weapons.

There are several countries that disagree with the Chinese position and have strong reservations about Chinese nuclear sales to Pakistan. A senior State Department official commenting on the recent deal said that a transfer of new reactors to Pakistan extended “beyond the cooperation that was grandfathered in when China was approved for membership in the NSG.”

Toughen U.S. Stance. The Obama Administration should sharpen its stance on additional Chinese nuclear assistance to Pakistan, especially since the Chinese actions are likely to increase instability in South Asia. Pakistan’s increased access to civilian nuclear technology without sufficient legal context and safeguards also poses a potential proliferation threat and danger to nuclear safety and security on the subcontinent.

In fact, a front-page story in *The Washington Post* last month highlighted the U.S. intelligence community’s concern about the safety and security of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. The article noted that the realization that Osama bin Laden resided for six years within a half-mile of the Pakistan military’s premiere defense academy had increased fear within the U.S. intelligence and policymaking community that al-Qaeda could eventually gain access to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons.

In light of these realities, the U.S. should:

- **Convince China to halt further civil nuclear sales to Pakistan until the NSG develops consensus on the matter.** As part of the effort to forge NSG consensus on the issue, and in light of Pakistan’s history of proliferating nuclear technology to other countries, the NSG should insist

on Pakistan cracking down on extremist groups and punishing those who have proliferated weapons technology in the past, namely Dr. A. Q. Khan.

- **Offer other types of energy cooperation to Pakistan.** Pakistan has enormous energy needs and argues that the increase in capacity for civil nuclear energy will help meet growing demand. At present, about 3.6 percent of the total electricity generated in Pakistan comes from nuclear power. The World Bank has committed \$700 million to the \$6 billion Dasu hydroelectric power project in Pakistan, while Islamabad and Washington recently finalized a plan to cooperate on a major hydroelectric project in Pakistani Kashmir. These projects will help Pakistan overcome its energy crisis without raising concerns about unsafeguarded nuclear facilities. The U.S. should focus on these types of energy projects and steer Pakistan away from the civil nuclear option.
- **Push for nuclear stability talks between India and Pakistan.** Pakistan’s drive to increase its nuclear weapons arsenal and efforts to include tactical nuclear weapons into its military doctrine are fueling tensions in South Asia and raising the risk that a potential future conflict between India and Pakistan could involve a nuclear exchange. The U.S. should coax both sides into focusing official dialogue on issues related to strategic stability and the safety and security of their respective nuclear arsenals.

Unhelpful to Stability and Security. China’s efforts to significantly boost Pakistan’s civilian nuclear capabilities outside an internationally sanctioned legal framework are unhelpful to U.S. goals of promoting regional stability and security. Given that Pakistan is home to a plethora of extremist groups and has a track record of proliferating nuclear technology to other countries, the U.S. should convince the Chinese it is in their national interest to work in tandem with the other NSG members on this issue.

—*Lisa Curtis is Senior Research Fellow for South Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.*