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# Pakistan: Challenges for U.S. Interests

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Thank you, Chairman Corker and Ranking Member Cardin, for the invitation to appear before the committee today. The issue you have selected—the policy challenge posed by Pakistan for U.S. interests – is both timely and important. The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has experienced significant highs and lows in recent years. Lamentably, the signs now point to more challenging times ahead. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to provide some personal views on this issue, noting that my employer, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, does not take institutional positions on policy matters.

In my remarks today I will try to provide a clear-eyed assessment of the challenges to U.S. policy posed specifically by developments in Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and what they mean for U.S. interests in South Asia. Though obvious, it is worth underscoring the point that Pakistan's nuclear weapons program does not exist in a vacuum. Nuclear weapons are central to Pakistan's security-seeking behavior in a region it considers to be enduringly hostile. From Pakistan's perspective, the trend lines are quite negative. India's economic growth, blooming strategic relationship with the United States, and development of nuclear and advanced conventional military capabilities and doctrines have been and will remain drivers of Pakistan's nuclear build-up. Experts are therefore understandably concerned that the 70-year security competition between India and Pakistan is becoming a nuclear arms race, albeit one in which the antagonists—unlike the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War—have fought four hot wars, still regularly exchange fire over contested territory, and quite possibly sponsor the activities of non-state actors who project violence across their shared border. Considering what we now know of the close calls experienced by U.S. and Soviet nuclear forces during the Cold War, the nuclear situation in South Asia is cause for concern.

Any nuclear explosion would have catastrophic consequences, which is why it will continue to be in the U.S. interest to sustain an ability to mitigate nuclear threats in South Asia even as its role and presence in the region evolves. The challenge with Pakistan is how to preserve patterns of cooperation and institutional relationships that facilitate U.S. influence at a time when Pakistani behavior in other spheres may be injurious to U.S. interests.

**U.S. Priorities**

U.S. priorities related to nuclear weapons in South Asia have shifted over time. While the United States first sought to prevent the development of nuclear weapons in the region, the focus shifted to cap and rollback of the Indian and Pakistani nuclear programs after the countries' nuclear tests in 1998 and then to ensuring the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and technologies. Today, there are two priorities above others that should guide U.S. policy.

The first priority is the prevention of intentional or inadvertent use of nuclear weapons, which is most likely to occur during a military confrontation. Successive U.S. administrations intervened with India and Pakistan—during the Kashmir crisis in 1990, the Kargil war in 1999, the crisis in 2001-02, and following the terror attacks in Mumbai in 2008—in order to contain conflict before nuclear weapons could be deployed. Although the two states have implemented several nuclear and military confidence building measures, these are insufficient to temper their security competition. And substantial differences in their deterrence practices invite the potential for misperception or miscalculation.

Second is to maintain the security of nuclear weapons and materials in order to prevent their theft or diversion. This priority has been front and center in U.S. global counterproliferation policy since the

9/11 attacks, resulting in efforts such as the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and the Nuclear Security Summits. The probability of a nuclear terrorist incident is low, but the consequences would be severe, both locally and globally, with the added concern that in South Asia, terrorists might attempt to use nuclear weapons to precipitate another Indo-Pak war.

The challenges inherent in these priorities continue to grow in complexity. Increases in fissile material stocks compound the difficulty of implementing effective and strong nuclear security practices. Changes in nuclear posture toward greater readiness and possible deployment especially of tactical nuclear weapons raise concerns about security and command and control. Evolving nuclear and conventional military strategies and postures pose greater risks of rapid conflict escalation. And violent nonstate actors have targeted government and military facilities; some of the same groups have expressed interest in nuclear weapons. To be clear: these are challenges that derive not just from conditions in Pakistan, but also in India, China, and even the United States. My focus will be more on Pakistan, given the subject of this hearing, but it is worth reiterating that nuclear dynamics there have regional and global aspects.

**Pakistan's Nuclear Development**

What is known publicly about Pakistan's nuclear weapons program is mostly what Pakistan wants India (and the world) to know for deterrence purposes. When it flight tests a nuclear-capable missile, the military issues a press release. When the nuclear command authority meets to discuss threats and policies, they issue a press release. But the other essential facts of the Pakistani nuclear program are fairly elusive. Public assessments rely largely on analysis of satellite imagery by non-government organizations, occasional media articles featuring leaks of governmental information, and the writings and statements of Pakistani officials and experts. This information suggests that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal may number 120 or more weapons, but over the past decade it expanded significantly the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. In addition to existing facilities to produce highly-enriched uranium, Pakistan constructed and now operates four reactors to produce plutonium. It is not clear whether Pakistan is concurrently processing all of this material, or that it is going straight into nuclear weapons, but if it did so, Pakistan could add perhaps 20 nuclear weapons per year to its arsenal. Estimates such as this produce the common perception that Pakistan has the "fastest growing nuclear program."

There is somewhat clearer data about the nuclear-capable missiles Pakistan has tested, based on statements by the government as well as videos and photos of the launches, but that data does not extend to missile production rates or deployment status. In recent years, Pakistan has supplemented its fleet of medium-range ballistic missiles with a short-range battlefield missile, the Nasr. Pakistani government officials assert that it will carry a low-yield, tactical nuclear weapon in order to deter India from carrying out conventional military operations on Pakistani territory. Pakistan also has tested a longer-range missile, the Shaheen-III, which could target Indian military facilities as far away as the Andaman and Nicobar islands. And it has tested two nuclear-capable cruise missiles, linking these to concerns about an eventual Indian ballistic missile defense system. The conventional wisdom is that Pakistan does not deploy nuclear weapons in peacetime, that it keeps warheads and delivery vehicles separate. Whether and how long this non-deployed status will remain the case is an open question.

Why has Pakistan undertaken this expansion of the size and scope of its nuclear forces? There are two forces at work here. The first is reactive, based on a perceived need to meet an expanding set of

threats from India. Following the nuclear tests in 1998, Pakistan announced that it would seek credible minimum deterrence. But then the Indian economy began to grow, as did its defense spending and along with it discussion of offensive conventional military doctrines. Concurrently, the United States and India announced a strategic partnership, under which the United States would essentially remove the shackles on India's nuclear energy program. In Pakistan, these developments led many to believe that minimum deterrence of existential threats was insufficient for Pakistan's security. Thus, in 2011, Pakistan began to talk about instead about so-called "full-spectrum deterrence," under which nuclear weapons will be used to deter not just a nuclear war, but also other threats such as an Indian conventional military attack. It is in this context that Pakistani officials have dubbed the Nasr—a tactical, battlefield nuclear weapon—a "weapon of peace," because it is supposed to prevent India from seeking space for limited conventional military operations short of Pakistan's nuclear red-lines.

The second force behind Pakistan's nuclear expansion is, for want of a better term, the black hole of deterrence logic. By this, I mean that as Pakistan places increasing emphasis on nuclear weapons to counter Indian military threats—rather than conventional arms—nuclear deterrence has become a self-reinforcing phenomenon. From Pakistan's few official pronouncements on nuclear doctrine and statements by government officials, it is clear that deterrence is understood to be elastic: whenever the Indian threat grows, more or new nuclear capabilities are needed. The expansion of the target set to cover the full spectrum of nuclear and conventional military threats necessitates more missiles of various ranges and capabilities, as well as more warheads, and also greater amounts of fissile material. The bureaucracy to manage these capabilities grows in size and importance, and demands more budget. At some point, nuclear weapons become a solution in search of a problem. Today that means short-range battlefield nuclear weapons, but who knows where this logic might lead tomorrow. Early hints of this dynamic seem to be at play in Pakistan, and this state may well be its future, despite official assertions that nuclear weapons are only for deterrence against India and that it cannot afford an arms race. The concern about this logic taking hold is that it becomes exceedingly difficult to introduce alternative security models that would place less priority on nuclear weapons.

**Implications for U.S. Priorities**

The growth in Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and the broadening of its deterrence objectives raise thorny challenges for U.S. interests to prevent a nuclear explosion and to maintain effective security on nuclear weapons and materials.

The stated Pakistani concerns about India's offensive conventional military planning are not without merit. Pronouncements from the Indian military and strategic community make clear that India has been contemplating ways to punish Pakistan for continuing to harbor and even support militant groups that have carried out attacks in India. Many Indians view this search in terms of restoring deterrence. In their view, Pakistan is unlikely to rein in groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba unless and until India credibly threatens damage to Pakistan's interests in ways that don't invoke Pakistan's nuclear doctrine. Accordingly, the Indian Army has sought to formulate and exercise a proactive strategy, often called "Cold Start," the point of which is to be able to rapidly mobilize sufficient firepower to overwhelm Pakistani defenses and inflict defeat on the Pakistan Army. Even if the Indian military could carry out such an operation, many experts doubt that the Indian government would ever sanction it, given the inherent potential for conflict escalation. But for Pakistan, this threat—real or perceived—has provided ample justification for its nuclear build-up.

Pakistani analysts also point out that India is augmenting its own nuclear weapons, not just its conventional military arms. Publicly-available evidence indicates that India continues to pursue a triad of land-, sea-, and air-delivered nuclear weapons in order to provide a secure second strike capability, while maintaining minimum credible deterrence in accordance with its announced doctrine. It is possible India's nuclear posture will change or its arsenal will grow beyond an estimated 100 or so weapons as it seeks to balance deterrence challenges posed both by China and Pakistan. Some reports suggest that, like Pakistan, India is also expanding its fissile material production; given the opacity of India's nuclear research program and mixing of civilian and weapons facilities, though, it is not clear whether additional fissile material would go into an expanded nuclear arsenal or into some other activity.

The sum of these developments is a region with multiple potential sources of conflict, unclear nuclear redlines, and considerable room for miscalculation. It is alarming that, privately, Indian and Pakistani officials and experts indicate they do not find the other's nuclear policy credible. Many Indians (and some Pakistanis) argue that there is no such thing as "tactical" nuclear use that can be confined to the battlefield, that any use of nuclear weapons against India will result in nuclear retaliation. For their part, many Pakistanis (and some Indians) believe that India would not actually respond to limited nuclear use on the battlefield with "massive retaliation," as the Indian nuclear doctrine calls for. There is no shared sense of where nuclear redlines might be drawn. Political pressure seems to be growing in India for a punitive response to the next terror attack attributed to Pakistan. But given the importance of nuclear deterrence for Pakistan, its officials will face severe pressure to respond to any Indian military action, lest the credibility of their deterrent threats be eroded. Should there be another crisis, the potential speed of escalation may not afford the United States much time to intervene and attempt to contain the conflict. This necessitates that American officials and military officers maintain strong working relationships with their counterparts in both countries.

The same is true of efforts to secure nuclear weapons and material. Here it is useful to distinguish between activities to strengthen security and those to mitigate threats. Both are important. To be fair, Pakistan is not given sufficient credit for the nuclear security practices it has put in place. By most indicators, its security is probably quite good, but not foolproof. It has learned lessons from the A.Q. Khan affair and it has responded to international fears about terrorists acquiring weapons by putting in place a comprehensive security strategy run by a professional branch within the military. The prominence given to nuclear weapons in Pakistan's national security strategy means that the government has a very strong interest to protect them. To date, there is no public information that indicates any close calls of material going missing, and no hints of further technology leakage after the Khan proliferation network was dismantled.

But the frequency and severity of terrorist attacks on military facilities, including on some thought to store nuclear weapons, speaks to the high threat environment. In addition to implementing the best possible nuclear security, it is also necessary to degrade the capabilities and reach of non-state groups that might seek to steal or explode a nuclear weapon or material. Thus, U.S. policy can't focus only on improving security—there is necessarily a counterterrorism component as well. It is a long-standing American (and Indian) complaint that Pakistan harbors—and in some cases actively supports—groups that harm U.S. interests in the region. Yet it is still in the U.S. interest to support Pakistan's fight against groups such as the Pakistani Taliban to the extent that these groups pose potential threats to Pakistan's nuclear weapons. This tension is unavoidable.

**U.S. Influence**

What means of influence can the United States employ to address the priorities described here? Although successive U.S. administrations have sought to pursue non-zero-sum relations in South Asia, it is clear that U.S. actions or policies toward one state have effects on the other. This has important implications for the ability of the U.S. government to shape the primary challenges to its interests.

If nuclear weapons are most likely to be used during military conflict, then it makes sense to promote policies to prevent conflict. Here, the U.S. role in the region has evolved in recent years—U.S.-India relations have blossomed while U.S.-Pakistan relations have become more troubled. In the past, Pakistan sought to catalyze U.S. intervention as a way to internationalize the dispute over Kashmir, while India actively opposed any U.S. policy interest in a resolution to the Kashmir issue. India has not been overly welcoming of U.S. intervention unless it came with promises to coerce Pakistan to crack down on groups that attack India. Meanwhile, most Pakistanis probably do not trust the United States to be an honest broker in regional disputes. Thus, in the abstract, it is difficult to frame the role the United States might play in addressing likely sources of conflict.

Instead, it may be more feasible for the U.S. government to seed and facilitate crisis mitigation measures—essentially firebreaks that could slow escalation. This objective is particularly worth pursuing if Pakistan demonstrates the commitment to not only investigate groups and individuals that carry out attacks in India—as it did initially following the attack in January this year on the Indian air base at Pathankot—but also to prosecute them.

Turning to the security of nuclear weapons, in addition to degrading terrorist threats, another approach is to provide direct assistance when and where possible, utilizing cooperative programs undertaken by the U.S. Departments of Defense, Energy, and State, as well as those offered by organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. Trust is a necessary condition for this kind of engagement, given the sensitivities involved. Before and after the U.S. operation that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden, there was a prevalent narrative in Pakistan that the United States was trying to denuclearize it. That kind of story is very corrosive to the trust necessary to sustain cooperation on sensitive issues such as nuclear security. Security is not an absolute, nor is security cooperation an end to itself. And at some point the marginal cost may not produce marginal gain, but with the continuing threat posed by groups such as the Pakistani Taliban and possibly the self-proclaimed Islamic State, it does not seem prudent to risk such cooperation now.

At the same time, as noted previously, the security challenge is growing because of actions taken by Pakistan, specifically the buildup and diversification of its nuclear arsenal. Arsenal growth and effective security run at cross purposes. Ideally, the United States and others should seek ways to convince Pakistan to flatten the growth curve of its nuclear program. The honest assessment, however, is that since Pakistan embarked on a nuclear weapons program in earnest after it suffered defeat in the 1971 war with India, little the United States has tried—both in terms of sanctions and inducements—has had an appreciable impact on the scope and scale of Pakistan's nuclear development.

As in the past, it is very unlikely today that employing punitive measures, or even the conditioning of support in other areas such as financing of military equipment, would have a significant impact on Pakistan's nuclear program. Moreover, such sanctions would likely jeopardize the trust necessary to continue security cooperation and possibly also the relationships integral to intervention in a possible future militarized crisis. By the same token, and speaking hypothetically, there is probably no amount of aid or financial support that the United States could provide that could change the direction of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, largely because of the political effect in Pakistan: no leader could be seen as selling out Pakistan's nuclear weapons to the Americans.

Recognizing that U.S. options and leverage are quite limited, an alternative approach would be to support the development of an Indian and Pakistani logic of managing their security competition through negotiated limitations on nuclear and military capabilities and postures. Or, to put it in blunter terms: to support arms control. It is hard to imagine either India or Pakistan signing onto an arms control agenda today, but leaders in both countries may find the logic appealing in the future as a way to extricate themselves from their security dilemma. For mutual restraint to work, it must have an internal logic and internal constituencies—it can't be imposed by or be seen as the agenda of external actors. But there may be ways to incentivize some of the early steps on this path. One possible opportunity is through membership in international regimes that both seek to join, and specifically the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). If there were a process to negotiate benchmarks for membership for both states, it could encourage them to take steps to temper impulses in their security competition that exacerbate the challenges described above.

In this regard, the policy of the current U.S. administration to support an unconditional and exceptional NSG membership path for India is problematic. This policy requires no commitments from India to bring its nuclear weapons practices in line with those of other nuclear states in return for membership. It also opens no pathway to membership for Pakistan that would incentivize it to consider nuclear restraints. It is not surprising that the U.S. policy has encountered significant opposition from a number of other NSG members, not least China, who argue that the group should utilize objective criteria when considering the membership of states like India and Pakistan that have not signed the international Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Perhaps the next U.S. administration will rethink this policy approach and the opportunities it presents to address the two nuclear priorities described here.

In closing, against the backdrop of an evolving U.S. role and presence in the region and the challenges to U.S.-Pakistan relations, but considering the potential consequences of a nuclear incident, there continues to be a profound need for the United States to sustain options to mitigate perceived nuclear threats. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by Pakistan to U.S. interests, this means preserving to the extent possible patterns of cooperation and institutional relationships that facilitate U.S. influence.