Pakistan: The FMCT Debate Within

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What is Pakistan’s position on the Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty (FMCT)? Would the country enter negotiations on a FMCT? What conditions are acceptable to Pakistan to become a party to this treaty?

Pakistan would enter negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty (FMCT) today if the treaty: addresses the asymmetry in stockpiles; reduces the existing stockpiles of nuclear materials by each party as a disarmament measure; and addresses Pakistan’s security concerns emanating from India’s growing nuclear and conventional capabilities.

Why is Pakistan adamant on its position about the inclusion of existing stockpiles in the draft of the FMCT before negotiations could begin in the Conference of Disarmament (CD)? The answer is very simple. In its cost-benefit analysis, Pakistan will have to pay the heaviest price if the FMCT is concluded without the parties reaching an agreement about reducing their current stockpiles of fissile materials, and ensuring that their existing stocks will not be used to develop more nuclear weapons.

Pakistan is the only nuclear-armed state whose declared nuclear deterrent is aimed at the threat emanating from one specific country, India. Pakistan maintains that India has had a head start in developing its fissile material stockpiles well before it tested its first nuclear explosive device in 1974; and thus, there exists an asymmetry in stocks between the two countries, which favors India by the virtue of its stated nuclear ambitions. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, Russia, China, France, and the UK) already have a moratorium on nuclear fissile material production, have huge stocks of fissile materials, and nuclear deterrents that are not threatened by other nuclear armed countries or new nuclear aspirants. Therefore for the P-5, the conclusion of the FMCT, which does not ban the use of current stocks to develop more weapons, is a free ride with no costs attached. Pakistan, however, does not have the luxury to be complacent about the credibility of its deterrence when the very object of its deterrence continues to adjust and expand the limits of its nuclear capabilities.

A critical part of organised hypocrisy has been the development of popular narratives about selective norms of non-proliferation and their inconsistent application in certain cases. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for example, was created in 1974 directly as a result of the Indian nuclear test to stop countries from exploiting civilian nuclear technology like India did. In 2008, the same group (of 46 countries) granted India a specific waiver, to enjoy civilian nuclear technology cooperation with the US, thereby ‘voting itself out of existence’. What has changed since 1974? India is still not a signatory of the NPT, does not intend to sign the CTBT, and since 2008, has signed several civilian nuclear cooperation agreements with various countries, ensuring the supply of nuclear fuel for its civilian nuclear program perhaps for the next sixty years. What are the assurances this time that India will not direct these materials towards weapons’ build up like it did earlier? None.

The popular narrative to justify organised hypocrisy through nuclear cooperation agreements with India is developed around: India’s impeccable non-proliferation record (which essentially means the absence of an Indian equivalent of the AQ Khan network), recognition of its rapidly growing energy needs as a rising power in Asia, and strengthening of non-proliferation norms by the inclusion of a rising nuclear power like India. This narrative is convenient and self-serving, since it stands to oblige those forces which will profit from the fruits of nuclear commerce at the expense of the non-proliferation norms. These nuclear cooperation agreements threaten the nuclear balance in Asia because ‘every pound of uranium that India is allowed to import for its power reactors frees up a pound of uranium for its bomb program’. Pakistan’s position on the FMCT thus needs to be appreciated in this context, since it aims to address concerns emanating from Indian vertical proliferation having the potential to dilute the credibility of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence.

The international non-proliferation regime can best be categorised as ‘organised hypocrisy’. Stephen Krasner defines
organised hypocrisy as an inherent part of the complex international system where a state’s behaviour is inconsistent with the norms and principles it rhetorically endorses. The international system is unpredictable and complex, and the rules and norms of the system constantly clash with a state’s national interests, making it difficult to remain consistent in its behaviour. One could argue that if there are inconsistencies in behaviour, then as a matter of principle, new rules and norms should be established. But we have observed that in the case of a non-proliferation regime, no new norms have been established over the past several decades to deal with the inconsistencies in behaviour; instead, existing norms have been selectively observed. The de jure nuclear weapons states continue to retain their nuclear deterrents citing national security concerns, while other countries with similar national security concerns are discouraged from the option to ensure their security through the development of nuclear weapons. It is this organised hypocrisy against which Pakistan refuses to bow.

Given Pakistan’s national security concerns emanating from the organised hypocrisy of the international non-proliferation regime coupled with expanding Indian conventional and nuclear capabilities, it is unlikely that any new civilian government in Pakistan will change its current position on the FMCT.