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Pakistani stance on FMCT - An alternative approach (Centreline)

Shams uz Zaman, Mr.

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Pakistan force posture is India centric mainly for the reason that Indian mechanized forces can’t effectively be used against any other state, including China due to terrain restrictions and are thus poised against Pakistan. Pakistan’s India centric paranoia is unmatchable with its nuclear capability which has global dimensions. Although Pakistan perceives no other existential threat to it except India, not even the militants engaged in a bloody battle against state forces in the tribal region and North, this perception however is not shared by most in the west especially United States. Their apprehensions persistently are reflected in diplomatic statements causing stir in the international media which continuously resonates in diplomatic and international forums from time to time. Despite Pakistani leaders’ and foreign office repeated reassurances, these malicious reports regarding Pakistani nuclear program refuse to fade away. Of late, the Pakistani stance on FMCT in CD has spelled a new spirit in these speculative reports thus placing Pakistan at the centre of the diplomatic storm and media blitz.

Pakistani stance on FMCT, although is principled, it has two profound implications. First, it has isolated Pakistan at the forum and second, it has shielded India and Israel from taking any pressure and criticism while sharing the same position which has been adopted by Pakistan. Incidentally one of these two states is considered as a staunch enemy, while the other never had any diplomatic relations with Pakistan. The question therefore arises that, is Pakistan defending Israeli and Indian interests at the cost of its own reputation and whether taking such an extreme position and standing alone in the diplomatic community is a wise diplomatic manoeuvre?

After the Indo-US nuclear deal Pakistan perceives that the asymmetries in the nuclear and conventional field would grow dramatically thus profoundly affecting the nuclear equilibrium in the region and tilting the balance of power in favour of India. This deal would enable India to address the Uranium shortage issue by importing enough Uranium for its safeguarded reactors while at the same time utilizing its domestic stocks for increasing weapons stockpiles. Pakistan, therefore has taken a position at CD by blocking negotiations on FMCT and asking member states to adopt a criterion based approach by taking into account the issue of existing stocks of fissile material and overall regional strategic equilibrium. This Pakistani position is however ambiguous and can be interpreted in numerous ways. One interpretation could simple mean that freezing the production of fissile material, after declaring the existing stocks, other could be that by declaring a separate ratio for each state according to existing socks of fissile material and yet another could be by setting a universal threshold which must not be crossed and states holding surplus quantities of fissile material must bring it down to the mandatory level. The last interpretation is highly improbable as it would require the de-jure nuclear states to cut their stocks of fissile material and accept a nuclear parity with small de-facto nuclear states.

There are no precise known numbers of nuclear weapons possessed by countries like Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea and China. It is also believed that all these countries are building up their nuclear inventory, some at steady while other at a measured rate. It is interesting to note that almost all of these, specially the non-NPT signatory, don’t want FMCT to be concluded in its current form as it
may undermine the credibility of their nuclear deterrence. Indian quest of vertical proliferation is due to the aspirations of acquiring a stature of global nuclear power and at the same time regaining conventional advantage over Pakistan while Israel perceives that the US informal nuclear umbrella hanging over it may not prove to be eternal due to various political, economic and strategic compulsions. Pakistan on the other hand considers growing nuclear asymmetries with India, a serious threat to the credibility of its nuclear deterrence and hence has refused to blink over its stand on FMCT even under immense diplomatic pressure. However, if analysed dispassionately, the early the FMCT is concluded the better it would be for the credibility of its nuclear deterrence. Pakistan is believed to be at parity with its rival and potential adversary in nuclear number game. So if FMCT comes into force early, and considering that India and Israel also signs it, Pakistan nuclear deterrence against India and Israel would freeze in perpetuity thus saving national exchequer for better purpose rather on building the nuclear stockpiles.

It however, is very unlikely that India and Israel signs FMCT in near future. In such a situation, Pakistan thus would be enjoying the flexibility of attaching the condition of "India and Israel signing first" to its signing of FMCT while keep building its nuclear inventory at a measured pace to ensure universal credibility of its nuclear deterrence. A question therefore arises that, is it wise to take a stand on an issue and stand alone in the world community while defending the national interest of its arch rival and potential adversary or would the diplomatic brinkmanship lie in supporting FMCT while letting its arch rivals to take a stance which in turn assists Pakistan in securing its national interest?

The purpose of ongoing hype and drum beating against Pakistan’s so called, "Rash Nuclear Build-up” is to demonize and isolate Pakistan in the international community while projecting it to be an irresponsible state. The current Pakistani stance at CD would just help that image to strengthen within the world community thus consolidating a case against its nuclear program besides putting it at the back foot on demand of granting equal nuclear status alongside India. No matter how strong assurances to the west are offered either by the NCA or foreign office in defence of Pakistan nuclear program, the propaganda and the mal-intentions prevailing in the western capitals and media won’t fade away until and unless we stop providing them the opportunities for this kind of drum beating as actions speaks louder than words. Moreover, the US has already hinted that in case the progress on FMCT at CD remains stalled, it might well be referred to UN General Assembly for approval by early 2012. Pakistan would have run out of Aces by then and would have no other option expect for lobbying few states in its favour.

A more wise and rationalistic approach therefore would be to support enforcement of FMCT in an earlier timeframe while letting India and Israel to face the blunt in the CD for opposing it. However, Pakistan must make its signing of FMCT conditional to that of India and Israel's.

The writer is students of M.Phil – Strategic and Nuclear Studies Department at the National Defence University, (NDU), Islamabad.