

NMF Article

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Proliferation as strategy

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President Obama said in the 47nation Nuclear Security Summit , *“Two decades after the end of the Cold War, we face a cruel irony of history -- the risk of a nuclear confrontation between nations has gone down, but the risk of nuclear attack has gone up..... Terrorist networks such as al Qaeda have tried to acquire the material for a nuclear weapon, and if they ever succeeded, they would surely use it. Were they to do so, it would be a catastrophe for the world -- causing extraordinary loss of life, and striking a major blow to global peace and stability.”* He was highlighting that the era of inter-state nuclear confrontations is steadily moving towards a close. Yet there are nations which are attempting to acquire nuclear weapons, such as Iran and North Korea. Of late Myanmar is also mentioned often in this connection .The White minority apartheid regime in South Africa also developed nuclear weapons to resist regime change and promptly gave them up when regime change became inevitable. Unfortunately analysts have not focused on the advantages in possession of nuclear weapons other than inter-state deterrence. The credit for developing the new original thought on nuclear weapons must be given first to China and then to Pakistan. China was in utter chaos during the years of Cultural Revolution. Yet there was no attempt by any external powers to induce regime change in that country. Similarly in spite of Pakistan being the safe haven of Al Qaeda, Taliban and other terrorist organizations operating in various countries there has been no talk of externally induced regime change in that country. So is the case with North Korea. It is therefore no surprise that countries like Iran and Myanmar whose regimes lack adequate legitimacy are trying to acquire nuclear weapons not for any aggressive purposes, but to ensure that there will be no attempt to induce any regime change.

This development should not come as a surprise to the US since in 1982 it agreed to look away from the Chinese proliferation to Pakistan and not to think of a regime change against the military

dictatorship. The genius who thought of acquiring international influence and strategic advantage by proliferating nuclear weapons to states with regimes of inadequate legitimacy which often use terrorism as state policy was the Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping. In a sense he was following the Maoist line that all 'peace-loving' countries were entitled to have nuclear weapons and therefore nuclear proliferation was desirable. In early 80's, Deng decided to proliferate to Pakistan, North Korea and Iran. The proliferation to North Korea balanced Japan and South Korea. Pakistan countervailed India and opened doors to China into the Islamic world. Iran was a Shia country rich in oil and at that time most vociferously anti-US that needed to be cultivated separately. All of them were using terrorism as state policy and were vulnerable to externally induced regime change and therefore needed nuclear insurance. Since these regimes cannot wage nuclear war without worrying about their countries being totally devastated in retaliatory or punishing strikes China may have calculated that risks of nuclear war were not high. China also cultivated Saudi Arabia by supplying the CSS-2 long range missiles which was relevant only as a nuclear weapon carrier.

Thanks to nuclear proliferation protected terrorism, the US homeland itself came under attack and terrorism and with Pakistan as the epicenter fully shielded by the Chinese proliferated nuclear weapon capability has preoccupied US, Western Europe and India.

China is in dire need of hydro-carbon resources and they are concentrated in the West Asian Countries .Shia-Sunni millennia old animosity came useful for China to tap both sides of the Islamic divide for its hydrocarbon resources .Their proliferation to Pakistan and supply of long range missiles to Saudi Arabia made Iran nervous and compelled it to embark on efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Iran had to rely on China to resist the pressure of sanctions of US and the West. They also relied on Chinese missile technology. China was therefore able to sign up for advantageous oil exploration deals in Iran and the emergent Shia majority Iraq. Fresh missile deals with Saudi Arabia post Iraq invasion facilitated assured oil supplies from that country. China already has got a pipeline laid for supply of Turkmenistan natural gas .China has also invested in copper mines in Afghanistan and the recent disclosure of US authorities of a trillion dollar mineral mining prospects in Afghanistan should make that country a valuable destination for exercise of influence and commercial exploitation. The effective instrumentality to achieve that will be a Pakistani Army-supported Taliban regime in Afghanistan and exclusion of US and the West from that country.

Pakistani dominance over a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan will revive the covert war between Pakistan and Iran over Afghan territory. That will make both more reliant on China.

Pakistani is likely to accept US military assistance and Kerry–Lugar aid on its own terms. It is imperative for Pakistan Army to keep the US and the West under the threat of terrorist attacks to milk aid from them. Therefore Pakistan Army is not likely to cooperate in the final liquidation of the extremist terrorist groups which are deemed their strategic assets. Pakistan Army is likely to calculate - if worse comes to the worst some 3-4 billion dollars of annual aid can always be afforded by a cash-rich China. Underlying all these calculations by China and Pakistan is the assumption that nuclear weapons and materials are safe from terrorist threat, an assumption obviously not shared by President Obama as revealed in his pronouncement at the Nuclear Security Summit.

The US and the NPT community have been totally helpless in preventing China wrecking the Non-Proliferation regime through its proliferation to Pakistan and North Korea and its compelling India to go nuclear. Once they found that US, under Carter-Reagan dispensation. was prepared to sacrifice the non-proliferation goals to gain Pakistani support for the Mujahideen operations in Afghanistan then they pulled out all stops and went to the extent of conducting the first nuclear test for Pakistan at their Lop Nor site on 26 May,1990. It must be conceded that nuclear proliferation as a strategy has so far paid high dividends to China.

There is only one risk of possible miscalculation in this hitherto successful strategy as happened in the case of apartheid regime in South Africa. There can be internally triggered regime change. In case of China it can be progressive democratization. That is likely to take time. In the case of Pakistan the terrorists may turn on the state to such an extent that the Pakistani Army is compelled to shed its strategic assets and give up terrorism as state policy. That is a nearer term possibility

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