

[SE5-CV-1] Nuclear Programs: Iran and Pakistan

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Full Summary

This panel focused on the current status and overall approach to nuclear weapons in Iran and Pakistan. The moderator, Ellen Laipson of the Stimson Center, noted the differences between the stories and focus of the nuclear programs for Iran and Pakistan, but highlighted the potential and actual instability in these countries often puts them together in a similar conversation on nuclear issues. The panel had a unique discussion between the intent and purposes of the respective countries' nuclear weapons and the response from the international community on how to handle these programs.

Emile Hokayem of the International Institute for Strategic Studies pointed out that there is uncertainty whether Iran is slowly building a nuclear program or rapidly trying to reach nuclear status. This uncertainty also connects with the purpose of Iran pursuing nuclear weapons. Mr. Hokayem noted Iran had sought nuclear weapons long before recent public discussions by Israel on its need to have all options open to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons. Israel is a welcome justification for Iran's nuclear program, but it was not always the initial reason for Iran developing nuclear weapons.

Mr. Hoyakem believed there were real tensions between how the West and the Middle East view Iran. The West usually focuses on tensions and how to ease concerns in the region. The other countries in the Persian Gulf see Iran as driven by a sense of purpose and intent on building nuclear weapons. Other countries in the Middle East do not doubt Iran is after nuclear weapons; consequently, this feeling drives the perception within these countries of the importance of internal dynamics in Iran. Ms. Laipson added that Arabs would be relieved if Iran had a setback with its nuclear weapons program, but they politically could not say it.

If Iran actually developed nuclear weapons, Mr. Hoyakem contended it would not necessarily be sufficient for big Arab countries in the region to go nuclear. Moreover, a nuclear Iran would not cause those countries to ask for extended deterrence. He believed the most important relationship in the region is with the United States. It is important for countries in the Middle East to understand where the U.S. is headed with its Middle East policy. Despite this important relationship, confidence in the United States from countries in the Middle East

is at its lowest point ever. Although Mr. Hoyakem did not say it was related to these factors, he noted the level of chatter on the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan nuclear relationship has grown.

For Pakistan, Feroz Khan of the Naval Postgraduate School argued the calculation for Pakistan’s nuclear weapons is connected to the dynamics with India. Pakistan’s overall nuclear program has to balance the need for energy with the need for deterrence; however, General Khan noted Pakistan is the only country that pursued nuclear technology for the purpose of building nuclear weapons. Now, the fear of preventive strike and the fear of sabotage are the motivators for Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program. Yet, General Khan worryingly suggested the killing of Osama bin Laden by American forces might actually cause Pakistan to focus more on the external threat to its nuclear weapons rather than an internal threat by terrorists stealing the weapons or information.

The killing of Osama bin Laden has increased the level of scrutiny and disconnect between the United States and Pakistan. For fear of anti-American protests, riots, and attacks, the Pakistan government often does not inform its citizens on the levels of interaction with the United States. Often for similar reasons, the U.S. government is willing not to inform citizens in Pakistan about U.S. work and aid assistance. This leads to the idea that the U.S. is always asking Pakistan to sacrifice and do things for the United States, and Pakistan gets nothing in return. However, this is not the case, and in this panel, the U.S.’s work with helping Pakistan with its nuclear safety was mentioned. General Khan described how shortly after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States, the U.S. Department of Energy began cooperating with the Pakistan government on nuclear safety issues, particularly the protection of nuclear substances. This assistance helped Pakistan enhance its nuclear safety and security procedures. Jeffrey Lewis of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute interjected that he could not see the U.S. helping Iran with nuclear safety and security issues.

Dr. Lewis argued the international community should not make exceptions or excuse countries for building nuclear weapons because of geopolitical concerns. Dr. Lewis believed the international community made a mistake allowing Pakistan to build nuclear weapons because of its geopolitical rivalry with India. Excusing countries allows for greater exceptions and leads to more countries developing weapons rather than eliminating them. He further expounded how Israel having nuclear weapons does not excuse Iran from violating the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards. Iran’s nuclear program threatens other NPT safeguards. This argument is important for dealing with North Korea. North Korea signed the NPT but later removed itself. Countries must continue to push North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons and return to the NPT, despite evidence that at the current time, North Korea will likely not give up its weapons. North Korean officials have suggested in private they

could be like Israel with regards to nuclear weapons. Most countries would not like a nuclear North Korea, especially one that follows the Israel model.

The role of China could certainly be discussed in any panel these days. Yet, China was not mentioned in this panel. General Khan made an interesting point about Pakistan feeling uncomfortable sandwiched between a nuclear India and Iran pursuing nuclear weapons. He mentioned there is some pressure within Pakistan for providing extended deterrence for Iran, yet geopolitically, Pakistan is wary of an Iran with nuclear weapons. With this uneasiness about a closeness in proximity to states with nuclear weapons, does China's relationship with Pakistan help ease some of those concerns being surrounded by nuclear countries? The China-Pakistan security relationship would have been fascinating to discuss with regard to Pakistan's insecurities about the region.

Iran and Pakistan do leave the international community in a tough position regarding nuclear weapons. The panelists discussed how negotiations and dialogue over Iran's nuclear weapons have been unsuccessful. Moreover, with Pakistan, the U.S.'s efforts to bring India into export control regimes and other nuclear related groups further emphasizes the exceptional nature of the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal, which make a international rules-based system for nonproliferation issues more difficult. Thus, the panel provided an interesting conversation on intention and purpose of nuclear weapons for Iran and Pakistan and the proper response from the international community to encourage more countries to give up nuclear weapons rather than pursue them

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