



# Why a “Nuclear Deal” with Pakistan is Not Realistic, Timely, or Wise

Prepared Statement by

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Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Keating, and members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify about the potential ramifications of a civil nuclear agreement with Pakistan.

Let me jump right to my bottom line: a nuclear deal of the sort apparently being discussed with Pakistan is hardly the “blockbuster” that some commentators in the media would have us believe. Even so, it is still poorly timed and, if pursued further, would be more likely to prove counterproductive to other near term U.S. security interests than to deliver significant benefits.

## Imagining a Good Deal

In the abstract, I can imagine a good nuclear deal with Pakistan. Pakistan's nuclear program is what vaults the troubled state into a tiny handful of nearly impossible policy challenges that keep policymakers and intelligence analysts worried even when other issues like Russia and ISIS crowd newspaper headlines.

Because nearly all U.S. analysts fear that Pakistan and India are on their way to a spiraling nuclear competition that will soon take to the seas in the form of nuclear-armed submarines, heading off a nuclear arms race in South Asia through diplomatic negotiations would be a major accomplishment. Accordingly, we should expect that diligent and creative American diplomats will explore various options for securing and limiting the expansion of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

I believe that a recent proposal advanced by scholars at two D.C.-based think tanks to “normalize” Pakistan captures the underlying logic of the discussions between Washington and Islamabad in recent months. Michael Krepon of the Stimson Center and Toby Dalton of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argue that Pakistan's leaders should—without any outside coercion or inducement—recognize that their nuclear arsenal is already big enough to deter India. They then argue that because deterrence has always been Pakistan's goal, Pakistan's nuclear managers should now voluntarily slow the costly program and join several international arms control agreements—including the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

In short, Krepon and Dalton argue that Pakistan has gotten what it needs from a nuclear program. With that success, Islamabad should pocket the benefits—financial and diplomatic—from voluntary restraint. The financial benefits are obvious. Money not spent on expanding a nuclear arsenal is money Pakistan can put to a wide range of other purposes, both military and civilian. For a state facing insurgency and massive developmental challenges, the extra cash should be very valuable.

On the diplomatic front, if Pakistan were to take steps to voluntarily limit its nuclear program, the report's authors suggest that the United States and the rest of the world would be more likely to sympathize with Pakistan's deep desire to be mainstreamed into the international nuclear order, sort of like India has been. This might eventually include Pakistan's membership in the flagship organizations of nuclear-armed states, like the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

It is important to note that such a deal would not, strictly speaking, be a tit-for-tat exchange of any sort. Krepon and Dalton recognize that there is nothing Washington can give Pakistan that would make its leaders take steps they believe are contrary to their security interests. This is a realistic recognition on their part. Yet I would go further to suggest that it is also an indication of just how unlikely Pakistan is to sign on to any deal at all.

## **Back to Reality**

This takes us back to reality. A nuclear deal with Pakistan—even of the very limited sort I’ve just described—faces big problems.

First, even if Pakistan were to take incremental steps to limit the future growth of its nuclear program, I suspect that would be insufficient for the United States to become a champion of Pakistan’s membership in the NSG. Limiting future nuclear growth would do too little to address Washington’s most pressing concerns about Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, which would still pose serious threats, including insider theft, onward proliferation, accident, sabotage, or unauthorized use. So, in other words, I doubt our own ability or interest in delivering even the limited diplomatic benefits promised by this sort of deal.

Second, and more important, I see no indication that Pakistan’s military leadership is inclined to place voluntary limits on the growth of its nuclear arsenal. That arsenal has always been justified as a deterrent against Indian aggression. And Indo-Pakistani relations are stuck in hostility.

Moreover, India, a rising power, is expanding its military. This will continue because New Delhi competes not only with Islamabad, but also with Beijing. Any Indian military sized to deal with Pakistan alone would be insufficient to defend against China, while any program sized to deal with China would pose a menacing threat to Pakistan. Because Pakistan uses its nuclear program to make up for India’s superior conventional military power, the chances of Islamabad accepting nuclear caps while India’s military grows are slim.

In sum, the triangular security dilemma between China, India, and Pakistan (or quadrilateral, if you include the United States) is a structural dynamic that favors persistent competition, most of all by the weakest player.

## **A Poorly Timed, Unwise Distraction**

Worst of all, the nuclear discussion shifts attention away from the underlying causes of American anxiety with Pakistan and the greatest stumbling blocks to effective partnership between Washington and Islamabad.

A comparison with the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal is instructive. Critics of that deal correctly pointed out that it does nothing to address Tehran’s other bad behavior, from imprisoning journalists to sponsoring terrorists. But the pressing need to keep Iran out of the nuclear weapons club—and the hope that a negotiated settlement would accomplish that purpose better than other options—at least offered a plausible, if still debatable, rationale for inking the deal.

The same cannot be said of a nuclear deal with Pakistan. Pakistan is already a nuclear weapons state. A successful deal would ultimately ratify that condition, not roll it back. Addressing Pakistan's activities on other, non-nuclear fronts is the more pressing U.S. requirement.

To be sure, Pakistan is hardly a declared American enemy like Iran. But the U.S. State Department has had trouble certifying that Pakistan's military has targeted the Haqqani Network of militants that has so viciously attacked U.S., Afghan, Indian, and coalition partners in Afghanistan. Nor do senior U.S. officials believe that Pakistan has seriously tried to go after Lashkar-e-Taiba, the terrorist group best known for its November 2008 commando raid on Mumbai, India that killed 166 innocents.

Several other pressing issues also deserve more attention in U.S.-Pakistan dialogues than does a nuclear deal. To start, Washington needs Islamabad's commitment to advance any "reconciliation" process with the Afghan Taliban, currently an essential pillar in the Obama administration's war termination strategy. Relations between Pakistan and India are also troubled; U.S. officials would be smart to encourage a resumption of their formal and back-channel dialogues, if principally as a tactic to forestall future crises. And Washington still has much to discuss with Pakistan about the state of counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations inside Pakistan, from its tribal areas to its major urban centers. With ISIS making a small but troubling show of force in neighboring Afghanistan, there are reasons for concern that Pakistan will be next.

Whenever these short-term agenda items are exhausted—an unlikely prospect anytime soon—Pakistan's current condition raises other fundamental questions about its long-term relationship with the United States. Pakistan's fragile economy remains dependent on outside support, underperforms relative to the needs of a fast growing population of nearly 200 million, and has pinned its future on a massive bailout from Beijing. Pakistan's political leadership is a civilian democracy in appearance but dominated by the military in all matters of substance. Pakistan's society is increasingly rent by violent sectarian cleavages and so deeply infected by anti-U.S. prejudices that it is hard to imagine the emergence of a trust-based partnership. In sum, Pakistan is a big country in an important location facing nearly insurmountable challenges at home and with its neighbors. The United States cannot begin to solve Pakistan's problems for it, but U.S. policymakers must be sensitive to their potential consequences for our own national interests.

My concern is that by turning senior-level attention to a nuclear deal, Washington sends a wrong and counterproductive message to Pakistan, as we have many times in the past. We are too likely to come across as distracted, unable to set and maintain priorities, and suffering from unfounded expectations.

This leads to my conclusion that pursuing a nuclear deal with Pakistan now is unrealistic, poorly timed, and unwise.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.