



## **Logic may help: Pakistan and the FMCT**

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In its first meeting of the year, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) again fell prey to Pakistan's opposition to the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). The resolution on the 'Programme of Work' for the commencement of negotiations could not be agreed since the 64-member CD works on consensus. Pakistan's principal opposition is on the issue of stocks of fissile material, which the treaty in its present form does not address. According to Islamabad, a treaty that does not lead to verifiable elimination of fissile material stocks and is only concerned with stopping future production of nuclear material is inherently discriminatory, does not serve the purpose of global nuclear disarmament, and most important, from Pakistan's perspective, renders the strategic balance in the South Asian region in favor of its archrival India. In other words, the issue of fissile material stocks is important not only for the goal of global zero but Pakistan's national survival as well.

The concern about fissile material stocks is genuine. Without taking stocks into account, any treaty on fissile material will remain an arms control measure at the most. Global zero is contingent upon a scenario where no state has nuclear material that could be diverted to nuclear weapons production. Pakistan's arguments are even more penetrating when it comes to the nuclear balance in South Asian and how it is linked with the fissile material inventories of India. India has a considerable stock of fissile material. Its nuclear program started producing plutonium for weapons use in 1963 when Canada offered India its first research reactor CIRUS. Subsequently, India built a reprocessing facility at Trombay which uses heavy water from the US. CIRUS and the Trombay reprocessing facility were jointly responsible for India's first (peaceful) nuclear test. Over the years, India has accumulated a lot of reactor-grade plutonium as well as weapons-grade plutonium. The reactor-grade plutonium comes from 17 heavy water nuclear reactors that use natural uranium as fuel. The spent fuel that these reactors generate contains a lot of reactor-grade plutonium: almost 1300kg of reactor-grade plutonium is in India's spent fuel stockpile. Even after the Indo-US nuclear deal, only 13 of these reactors would come under safeguards. Moreover, India has also produced more than 700kg of weapons-grade plutonium, thanks to research reactors CIRUS and DHRUVA and the reprocessing facilities at Trombay, Tarapur and Kalpakkam. Even if 100kg of plutonium was used for the nuclear tests, there is still an enormous amount of weapon-grade plutonium. India also has

an active uranium enrichment program that is intended to produce highly enriched uranium (20-40 percent) for a nuclear submarine - the third leg of the nuclear triad.

Since there are no guarantees that India will not transfer these fissile material assets to nuclear weapons in the future, Pakistan is right to claim that if the stocks are not taken into account, the FMCT would concede a 'strategic advantage' to India. This is further accentuated by the possibility of massive production of weapons grade plutonium if and when India's ambitious Fast Breeder Reactor program bears fruit. India is the only country, save Russia and Japan (whose program is on and off) pursuing a large-scale breeder program. US, Germany, France, and the UK have all abandoned their breeder programs. According to one authoritative estimate, if the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor - one of the world's biggest breeder reactors with a capacity of 500 MW - comes into existence, it can produce 144kg of weapon-grade plutonium with a fissile content of more than 95 percent annually.

However, none of the major states with fissile material stocks support verifiable elimination of those stocks. There appears to be a 'harmony of interests' among those states to ignore inventories. This community of key players in the CD has led to a characterization of Pakistan as a state bent on scuttling progress toward global nuclear disarmament. This was conspicuous in remarks by Rose Gottemoeller, US assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, in which she was "puzzled by" and "impatient about" the blocking of the resolution on the FMCT and cautioned that the treaty may 'wither on the vine' if something is not done soon. The EU, Russia, and other major powers also expressed anger. There are indications that a 'coalition of the willing' could negotiate the treaty outside the CD, as was the case with the Ottawa landmine treaty, if the situation within the CD does not improve.

Even if Pakistan's concerns are valid, the strategy of blocking the CD is foolhardy. India can easily counter Pakistan's accusations. Pakistan is increasing its nuclear weapons, not India. Islamabad now possesses the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal and is increasing its fissile material base. As far as India is concerned, India's fissile material inventories and weapons capabilities are not directly proportional; after all, India has fewer nuclear weapons than Pakistan. India, unlike Pakistan, is not a military state whose legitimacy depends upon flexing its nuclear muscle. Moreover, Pakistan is the focus of international concerns on nuclear proliferation and WMD terrorism. And when it comes to fissile material in the spent fuel of India's nuclear reactors, India has categorically stated that reactor-grade plutonium is important for its fast breeder reactor program and hence, for its energy security. This argument has been accepted by the US,

the NSG, and the IAEA and is manifest in the India-US nuclear deal.

Pakistan needs to make an honest assessment of the futility of obstructionism. There are four reasons why Pakistan should sign the FMCT. First, if Pakistan is really concerned about the strategic balance in the subcontinent, then it is more logical to get the FMCT ratified as soon as possible. Why allow a fissile behemoth like India to amass more fissile material by blocking the FMCT from coming into effect? Going strictly by the logic of nuclear deterrence, the marginal utility of Pakistan's arsenals decreases as India hoards more fissile material, given that India converts all its fissile material to weapons. If Pakistan is really concerned about a decapitating Indian first strike - which is the source of nuclear stability -- then the survivability of Pakistan's arsenal will increase if India's fissile material production is capped as soon as possible.

Second, once the FMCT is signed and ratified, responsibility to maintain strategic stability in the region will shift to India. Since India will possess more fissile material than Pakistan, any move on India's part to increase its nuclear capabilities by diverting fissile material stocks will become a global concern. Then, Pakistan will have a more robust case against India and international pressure will be easy to mobilize. One way would be to use the Henry J. Hyde act-H.R 7081- under which the US president has to report to the Congress on India's non-proliferation and disarmament commitments.

Third, internal considerations should also be pre-eminent among Pakistan's political decision makers when it comes to the FMCT. If Pakistan chooses to compete with India over the size of nuclear arsenals and fissile material, it might be digging its own grave. Even if the threat of theft of nuclear material is now low, the probability will increase as Pakistan's nuclear complex grows. For a state facing a grave economic situation and the threat of fundamentalism and extremism, a nuclear superstructure would be the last gift one can pray for. Difficulty in nuclear management accompanies the growth in size of nuclear arsenals, as more variables come in to play. In other words, the probability of human and technical error increases. As is evident from the history of minor but potentially devastating accidents involving nuclear weapons in states like the US, UK, and Russia, even resource rich and technically efficient states have not been able to master all aspects of nuclear safety and security for their nuclear complexes.

Finally, Pakistan's cooperation in FMCT negotiations may help the country make friends around the world. If Pakistan seeks recognition of its nuclear status, a policy of confrontation at the international level will not help. Beyond material power, being a good international citizen is increasingly considered the key to recognition and influence in international politics. Pakistan surely lacks the first. Cooperation appears to be a more pragmatic path if Pakistan wants the world to listen.

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