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Bleak Outlook for 2011 Conference on Disarmament

Summary

- The 2011 Conference on Disarmament (CD) began contentiously when Ambassador Zamir Akram, Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations, criticized United States' support of India's membership in export organizations that would allow it to engage in nuclear trade.
- Pakistan believes such membership would further favor India and accentuate the asymmetry in fissile materials stockpiles of the two states.
- Strategic and security concerns drive Pakistan's commitment to block negotiation of a fissile material cutoff treaty.
- Progress during the CD seems unlikely if the United States and Pakistan remain entrenched in their respective positions.

Introduction

The opening sessions of the 2011 Conference on Disarmament (CD) appear to be on a tumultuous track. During the first plenary of the CD, Ambassador Zamir Akram, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations in Geneva, criticized recent shows of support by the United States and others for India's membership in the four major multilateral export control organizations—the Nuclear Supplier's Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australian Group. These organizations seek to reduce proliferation risks by regulating and restricting trade in materials and technology associated with weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

Pakistan reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to block negotiation on a fissile material cutoff treaty (FMCT), a major priority for the Obama administration's nonproliferation policy and a key tenet of the work plan at this year's CD. Akram argued that admitting India to the 46 nation NSG and other export control organizations would lead to a strategic imbalance between the two nuclear-armed adversaries. The ambassador warned that continued movement down this path would tip the scales even further in India's favor. This imbalance would force Pakistan to "take measures to ensure the credibility of its [nuclear] deterrence."¹

Rose Gottemoeller, assistant secretary of state for arms control, verification and compliance, addressed the CD on the second day, and pressed the disarmament body to make "concrete progress" on critical nonproliferation and disarmament goals, which she noted had been languishing for nearly 15 years.² She called on the CD to carry forward its June 2009 agreement on a program

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of work to begin negotiations on an FMCT. Without mentioning Pakistan by name, Gottemoeller noted: "a single country—a good friend of the United States—changed its mind and has blocked the CD from implementing its work plan." She argued that waiting for movement by the CD to begin negotiations on an FMCT is not a viable option, and other alternatives may have to be found if the CD does not take up the issue.³

Pakistani Threat Perceptions

In 2008, as part of the negotiating process for the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, or 123 Agreement, the NSG granted India a waiver after considerable lobbying by the United States. The waiver permitted India to engage in nuclear trade with other countries despite not having all of its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) comprehensive safeguards. Under the NSG waiver, only India's civilian nuclear facilities are subject to IAEA inspections.⁴ Military nuclear facilities, i.e., the Indian nuclear weapons program and force structure, are not covered by the 123 agreement.

Although not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, Pakistan vocally opposed the 2008 agreement. The new movement to fully integrate India into the four export control groups has compelled Pakistan to voice opposition again. Akram called the waiver "discriminatory," and argued in his opening statements that the NSG waiver "will further accentuate the asymmetry in fissile materials stockpiles in the region, to the detriment of Pakistan's security interests."⁵

Pakistan sees India, who already possesses a comparatively large stockpile of fissile materials, as able to direct some of its existing material toward increasing its nuclear weapons program since the 123 Agreement provides for the transfer of U.S. fuel to India for civilian purposes. From Pakistan's perspective, surplus nuclear fuels and materials not used by India for civilian industry could be diverted to make more weapons. Akram noted this could significantly widen the gap between the two states' stockpiles of weapons grade fissile materials and potentially reduce the effectiveness of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent.⁶

Similarly, in discussions on the possibility of crafting an FMCT, Pakistan sees significant inequities. In a recent interview, Akram stated Pakistan's opposition to accepting an FMCT as it currently stands.⁷ This position is a reversal of Pakistan's previous commitment to a 2009 agreement on a program of work for the CD that included FMCT negotiation on its task list. Pakistan, however, maintains this has been its position since the FMCT's inception.

Given the FMCT parameters proposed by the United States and the potential implementation of a number of bilateral nuclear trade agreements, Akram estimates that India would have the capacity to produce 40 warheads per year.⁸ Pakistan also differs with the United States on the categories of fissile materials that should be covered by a treaty. For example, the United States, as well as most of the P-5 states, supports a ban of future stocks of fissile materials, thereby permitting those with existing stockpiles to maintain them. Pakistan says it would only support a total ban on fissile materials, including current stockpiles of all nuclear weapons states, as a step toward complete and total disarmament.

In terms of Pakistan's security concerns in relation to India regarding the FMCT, Pakistan perceives that India, with its comparatively larger stockpiles of existing fissile materials, could divert some of its nuclear material from a civilian program to boost its military program even after a ban on future materials comes into effect. Therefore, moving forward, a best case scenario for Pakistan would be to postpone any ban on fissile materials so Pakistan can hedge its fissile material production options for as long as possible.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The 2011 Conference on Disarmament began contentiously when Pakistan's representative criticized U.S. support for full Indian membership in export control organizations that would allow it to engage in nuclear trade. This Peace Brief seeks to capture some of the areas of contention, including the Pakistani block of a fissile material cutoff treaty, and place them in the context of Pakistan's larger strategic and security concerns vis-à-vis India. The author, Brian Rose, is a program specialist with the Institute's Nonproliferation and Arms Control Program, directed by Paul Hughes.



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Moving forward or watching failure?

The tense nature of the discussion thus far, coupled with the firm positions of the United States and Pakistan, are likely to present significant challenges to a successful 2011 CD if a compromise is not found. Moreover, the Obama administration's near- to -midterm nonproliferation goal of negotiating an FMCT, a treaty supported by the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States and more broadly by other American political leaders, may be in danger as a result of this impasse.

While chances of agreement between the United States and Pakistan appear slim in the CD, the administration must be mindful of Pakistan's strategic and security concerns—many of which are dictated by developments in Pakistan's threat perceptions vis-à-vis India—if it intends to move forward on the treaty. Pakistan must also be cognizant of the international community's call for the control of fissile material as a cornerstone of a broader nonproliferation effort that would benefit all nations, including Pakistan.

Endnotes

1. "Pakistan Warns Against India Nuclear Support," *Agence France-Presse*, January 26, 2011, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iv8V-px8Zw1R1FENPSvBtLd0PLtQ?docId=CNG.148a6c382024ebbebe64021de441dac9.751>.
2. Rose Gottemoeller, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, "2011 Opening Statement to the Conference on Disarmament," January 27, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/155400.htm>.
3. Ibid.
4. "The Nuclear Suppliers Group at a Glance," *Arms Control Association*, <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/NSG>.
5. D. Ravi Kanth, "Pak Blocks FMCT Negotiations," *Public Trust India* via Yahoo! News India, January 26, 2011, <http://in.news.yahoo.com/pak-blocks-fmct-negotiations-20110126-000200-683.html>.
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8. Ibid.