

**North Korea-Pakistan nuclear collaboration and the US concern**

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With the end of cold war, bipolar rivalry of the cold war era has been replaced by the emergence of multiple asymmetric threats. The challenge today is to broaden not only the concepts of the security of the state but also to closely examine the roots of the various threat perceptions. In the realm of international security due to the existence of weapons of mass destruction, prospective and present violators of nonproliferation are being considered as threats to tomorrow's peace. So remains the case of North Korea-Pakistan secret collaborations dealing with illegal missile and nuclear weapons development programmes.

Absence of a strong US response to Pakistan-North Korean nexus in nuclear weapons development programme appears to go against the realities of international nonproliferation norms. It is now acknowledged worldwide that for years US knew that North Korea has been selling missiles to Pakistan and Islamabad in turn was reciprocating with transfer of nuclear weapons technology to Pyongyang. Still, it is strange that Washington was reluctant to intervene in such relationship between Pakistan and North Korea. From a long term perspective, by overlooking uninterrupted Pakistan-Taliban relationship, US has had to pay a high price in terms of fighting against the international terrorist network like Al Qaeda. Similarly, Washington's indifference to the issue of Pakistan's involvement in proliferation of nuclear and missile technology may one day reach a point of no return with far reaching consequences.

During the peak of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan geared up most to exploit the situation and acquire non-conventional military capabilities. Pakistan has been continuing on the same track and flouting international norms and values of nonproliferation rather openly. Despite media reports and strategic assessments, the silence of US on Pakistan's covert connections in violation of international agreement like one with North Korea may cause irreparable damage to the international nonproliferation arrangements. The illegal practices of Pakistan might not be directly threatening the security of the US but the ramification of illegal transfers generating from North Korea and Pakistan could inexorably lead to spread of nuclear terror worldwide.

The Bush administration is said to have obtained an assurance from Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf not to help North Korea further in the nuclear development programme and this might be seen as an US attempt to calm the world community that Islamabad being a partner to fight against international terrorism should not simultaneously be clubbed with "axis of evil". This looks suspiciously similar to the policy that US had been applying to China for clandestine nuclear and missile exports to Pakistan or any other country. The failed pledges of China to US are more than a dozen in numbers, and the counting has just begun for Islamabad. At the same

time, the degree of severity and dimensions of threat will go on adding to the prevailing insecure world with weapons of mass destruction.

The probable “leak” could be both intentional and inadvertent. The worst could be said to come when the state itself indulges in proliferating nuclear collaboration with both the state actors and rogue non-state actors. In the case of Pakistan, potential pilferage of sensitive nuclear technology, design, equipment, materials and vital information may not only encourage the motivation of suspected state actors for nuclear weapons but also strengthen the imagination and planning of unscrupulous non-state actors or terrorist groups both inside and outside the country.

Despite years of growing CIA evidence and Indian insistence on Pakistan’s illegal acquisitions and nuclear programme, the US had been maintaining a stoic silence. In the meantime, Pakistan may create the secondary chain of unlawful demand and supply of nuclear and missile technologies. Islamabad’s history of brinkmanship to win concessions from US could hardly help the international community to arrive at some conclusive response against Pakistan. With North Korea, the story has been different.

It has now been acknowledged that Pakistan in May 1998 nuclear tests had used a Chinese design and one of the devices in the series of tests was from North Korea. While China supplied M-9 and M-11 missiles along with nuclear weapon design and technologies to Pakistan, Islamabad acquired Nodong (renamed Pakistani Ghauri) and Taepodong missile systems and technology from North Korea. It is believed that China had helped Pakistan with the guidance systems technology to improve the accuracy of Ghauri missiles and that subsequently this was transferred from Pakistan to North Korea.

Media reports reveal several formal and informal exchanges of technical personnel in the past between Pakistan and North Korea to sustain the covert projects of nuclear and missile know-how transfers. Islamabad is believed to have traded its nuclear technology with North Korea’s missile technology and systems as a barter arrangement.

Pakistan-North Korea relations for arms transfer is now some three decades old starting with North Korean supply of artillery, munitions and military equipments to Islamabad. The initial trade relation was based on North Korean need for hard currency and Pakistani demand for army equipment. This turned later into a barter arrangement. The watershed of state level authorization for carrying covert projects could be said to have rigorously started since Ms Benazir Bhutto came for the first time to power in December 1988 and subsequently sent few officials to North Korea for a feasibility study of new opportunities. Ms. Bhutto herself traveled to Pyongyang in 1993 to concretise the cooperation between North Korea and Pakistan.

The extent of murky involvement of Pakistani scientists and engineers under the state sponsored projects could be gauged from one of the important reasons reported for removal of the father of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb A. Q. Khan from the nation’s nuclear weapons development programme. He was far too much posted with the covert involvement in the trade of nuclear weapons technology between North Korea and Pakistan.

Pakistan's covert collaboration even amongst the scientific communities in and outside the country remains suspicious. Last year, it was reported that Kim Sa-nae, wife of a senior DPRK diplomat, was shot dead on June 9, 1998 in Islamabad just a week after Pakistan's first nuclear tests. Her husband Kang Thae-yun— who as economic counselor in the embassy worked for Changgwang Sinyong (CSC)— disappeared soon afterwards. Both were close to Abdul Qadeer Khan. The mystery remains unsolved, but the suspicion is that either or both had planned to defect and reveal all.

American alibi is that in the absence of concrete evidence, the US administration showed unwillingness to adopt tougher measures against Pakistan. In the same year of intelligence assessment when Pakistan conducted nuclear tests, in 1998, David R. Tomhank, a senior defence analyst in one unclassified working papers had mentioned that “North Korea and Pakistan have had a long history of nuclear and missile cooperation” and had suggested to the US administration to tighten sanctions against Pakistan for transferring sensitive technology to other states including North Korea. Subsequent documents by the American official agencies on status of North Korean proliferation activities clearly indicated the uninterrupted efforts of Pyongyang to develop missiles and nuclear weapons with outside connections.

In the Statement for the Record to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 16, 1999, on *Foreign Missile Developments and Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015* by Robert D. Walpole, national intelligence officer for Strategic and Nuclear Program, explicitly remarked that the Ghauri missile of Pakistan was flight tested with North Korean assistance. And the *National Intelligence Estimate*, released on January 10, 2002, admits openly that “North Korean willingness to sell complete systems and components has enabled other states to acquire longer range capabilities earlier than otherwise would have been possible— notably the sale of the Nodong MRBM to Pakistan”.

Instead of naming Pakistan as directly involved in unlawful transfers, the *Unclassified Report to the Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions*, 1 January Through 30 June 2000, mentioned about North Korea's continued export of significant ballistic missile related equipments and missile components, materials and technical expertise to the country in “*South Asia*”. While confirming Pyongyang's unrelenting efforts to acquire raw materials from out of the country entities, the report stated further that North Korea had produced fissile materials for at least one and possibly two nuclear weapons. It is surprising that even in the next report released by the same agency in January 2002, came out with similar findings on the capability of North Korea for nuclear weapons development programme. There was no official response.

There may be two reasons for the US silence. First, the US for its own interests or that of its allies in Asia might not have wanted to openly reveal the exact nature of enrichment facilities in North Korea. The potential fallout for US strategic needs must be there in the consideration of US administration for ignoring possible involvement of China and Pakistan nexus in the North Korean weapons development activities. Secondly, to defer international criticism, the route of achieving such capability by North Korea remains undisclosed by the American administration. In other words, the US has tactfully avoided contradicting few friends of American interests on the outside actors in aiding North Korea to build bomb.

**Conclusion:**

Islamabad's nuclear engagement with Korea is overlooked by the US perhaps in its own national interest and, so, carefully kept out of international scrutiny. In the case of North Korea being in the club of axis of evil the US is still set to exhaust all diplomatic options. Nothing is known about what US is going to do. It is said that the technology transfers from Pakistan took place even after Musharraf's rise to power. US is perhaps seeking to bail out Musharraf and Pakistan by regarding it as acts of past with the hope of not those getting repeated in the future.

In the post September 11 world of US led war against international terrorism, individual countries have been given the stark choice of either to be with US or face the consequences. The tools that Washington has been using are mainly of three types— use of force, coercive diplomacy or economic isolation. The choice of target remains with US at its discretion. In the realm of coalition against international terrorism, US softness towards Pakistan and American camouflaging of Pakistani denials have inexorably come in the forefront of every international agenda, especially for India.