



PROGRAM ON STRATEGIC STABILITY EVALUATION (POSSE)

www.posse.gatech.edu

The Sino-Pakistan Nuclear Cooperation: Further Development in the New Era

Zhang Jiegen

Institute of International Studies

Fudan University

November 12-14, 2012, Vienna

I Introduction

The year 2011 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan. In retrospect of China-Pakistan relations in the past sixty years, it's not difficult to conclude that security relation is the most important aspect in the bilateral relations. Generally speaking, China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation is an unavoidable subject when it comes to talk about the security relations between them. Unfortunately for China and Pakistan, with the consistent development of Chin-Pakistan nuclear relation, overseas media and academia often exaggerate the facts and suspect the real intention of them following each step of China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation.

In fact, with the end of the Cold War, China-Pakistan nuclear relations have changed greatly. However, relating to the above-mentioned suspicions, the exotic misunderstanding and worry about China-Pakistan nuclear relations have never waned in the Post-Cold War Era. This throws shadows on the ordinary China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation. How to improve their traditional friendly nuclear cooperation under the international pressure in the new era is a necessary and imperative issue for China and Pakistan now.

II China-Pakistan nuclear relation: History and emerging problems

China-Pakistan nuclear relation was rooted in the era of Cold War. So the right way to understand it well should trace back to the special history background. The Cold War witnessed not only the serious confrontation between India and Pakistan, India and China, but also intense rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in South Asia. In this context, the cooperation between China and Pakistan in the nuclear field mainly aimed at balancing India. According to the western intelligence, this cooperation included nuclear material and technology transfer relating to the military use. At the same time, due to India's alliance with the Soviet Union, the U.S. didn't really care about the nuclear proliferation in this area, which left ample space for China and Pakistan to develop their nuclear cooperation.

With the dramatic geopolitical changes in South Asia in the Post-Cold War, however, both the external security environments and the China-Pakistan nuclear relation in itself have changed greatly. Consequently, a series of problems have been emerging for China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation:

- (1) Ignoring the history background and being short of understanding the strategic needs of China and Pakistan, outside observers still understand this relation with the mind of Cold

War Era. As a result, it's not inevitable for them to misunderstand the friendly cooperation between China and Pakistan in the nuclear field with the discriminatory vision. Some of them even view China as a source of nuclear proliferation in South Asia and criticize the ordinary China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation acrimoniously.

- (2) In the Post-Cold War era, the U.S. and its western alliance pay much more attention to nuclear non-proliferation, especially those heavy proliferated areas such as South Asia. Any nuclear cooperation with the states in those areas should be much more cautious and strict. Without exception, China-Pakistan nuclear relations are also bound to the international supervision more and more.
- (3) Up to now, there exists only a comprehensive nuclear cooperation deal secretly signed in 1986 between China and Pakistan. Though more than twenty years have gone, China and Pakistan have never officially made this agreement public and disclose the specific transfer of the nuclear material and technology. This opaque strategy adopted by China and Pakistan had its reasonableness in the context of the Cold War, but it can't keep up with the process of the international nuclear nonproliferation in the new era. To some extent, it's exactly the reason why the China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation meets with so many external suspicions.
- (4) As a rapid rising power, China is attaching more importance to its international image. Obviously, if not managed well, nuclear cooperation with Pakistan, a nuclear state which can't be recognized by international nonproliferation regime, will do harm to China's strive in pursuit of the reputation as a responsible major power.

III Main Factors influencing the China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation

China-Pakistan nuclear relationship is an important part of the overall configuration of China-Pakistan relations. The perceptions on its importance relating to their respective diplomatic strategy are critical. It is the internal and the most important factor to think about the development and trend of China-Pakistan nuclear relationship in the post-Cold War era. At the same time, every step of the progress of China-Pakistan nuclear relationship affects the nerves of countries in South Asia and related countries outside of this region. The international community pays high attention to it, and therefore it can not be free from constraints of external factors.

First, the long-term nuclear cooperation between China and Pakistan is the product of comprehensive and friendly China-Pakistan relations. Strategically speaking, the China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation can be viewed as the key pillar of the whole China-Pakistan relations in the Cold War era. Though this has changed a little in the Post-Cold War era, its importance can't be ignored because the so called 'all weather' friendship between China and Pakistan still mainly exists in the security field. Due to the strategic importance of Pakistan in the integral configuration of China's foreign relations, keeping the traditional good relations with Pakistan in such key field

as nuclear cooperation is necessary for China.

Second, South Asian geopolitical situation is the most directly factors that affect China-Pakistan nuclear relationship. In South Asia, one basic geopolitical fact is the long-term confrontation between India and Pakistan. After the open nuclear tests of South Asia in 1998, it has evolved into a nuclear confrontation between two de facto nuclear-weapon states. Another geopolitical reality that can not be ignored is the gradually reconciled India-Pakistan relations in recent years. The two important geopolitical facts will play more and more important roles for China and Pakistan to develop their nuclear relations.

Third, the international nuclear nonproliferation regime and the trend of nuclear proliferation are important external factors affecting China-Pakistan nuclear relationship. Since the end of the Cold War, the international non-proliferation regime is more and more accepted by international community, but the momentum of nuclear proliferation in Asia is not optimistic. So far, the countries with more serious nuclear proliferation problems are basically in the surrounding areas of China. This can not fail to affect the development of China's foreign nuclear relationship, including the nuclear cooperation with the friendly and long-term strategic partnership, Pakistan.

Finally, the China-Pakistan nuclear relationship has obviously been affected by major power factors, mainly the United States and India. India factor obviously plays a more important role in the early stages of the development of China-Pakistan nuclear relationship, whereas United State's impact increased significantly in the Post-Cold War era. Besides, cooperation between the United States and India becomes important motivation to strengthen nuclear relation between China and Pakistan. The evolution of US-India civil nuclear agreement and the United States positively helping India look for special NSG waiver to permit nuclear trade with India lead to the discrimination of international nuclear regime towards Pakistan. As a key friend of Pakistan, China can not fail to take into account Pakistan's nuclear cooperation requirements.

IV Conclusion: Policy recommendation for China and Pakistan

For China and Pakistan, to further the cooperative relation more closely in nuclear area, some kinds of policy adjustments are necessary and imperative on the premise of keeping the traditional friendly cooperation.

Firstly, both China and Pakistan should not avoid making response to the international pressure straightforward despite that the nuclear cooperation between them is not recognized legally by international nonproliferation regime. On the contrary, if they strive to integrate into the international nuclear cooperative regime positively in the long run, the China-Pakistan nuclear relation may gain wider space to develop in the future. It's true for China and Pakistan to achieve this goal because of Pakistan's proliferation record in the past and the limited diplomatic capability of China in the international nonproliferation field. However, China should also help Pakistan look for special NSG waiver to permit nuclear trade with it just as what the U.S. has done

for India. Though the possibility of the success on this achievement is very slim, the positive meaning of it can't be denied because of two important reasons. One is that it can keep the mutual communication between China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation and international nuclear regime. Relating to this, another reason is that it can help the international community understand Pakistan's need to get cooperation from outsiders and stop criticizing Pakistan blindly with complete bias.

Secondly, the nuclear cooperation between China and Pakistan itself also needs to be mechanized. So far, the agreement for the China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation still needs to be traced back to the Cold War era, namely 1986 bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement. But now the times of the nuclear cooperation background is changing greatly, the contents of the agreement also need to be adjusted. At the same time, the form of agreement should not be in a secretive way, because opaque deal for the nuclear cooperation can only lead to more suspicion from international society. Corresponding to the US-India nuclear deal, a clear and integral civilian nuclear cooperative agreement, in despite of the difficulty to be recognized by international society, can reduce the international anxiety for China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation at least.

The third, the goal orientation of the nuclear cooperation should also need to be adjusted. Differentiating from the traditional way that both China and Pakistan pay too much attention to the strategic value, the bilateral nuclear cooperation now should emphasize on commercial value as much as its strategic value, and pay more attention to realize the business value in actual operation. Therefore, the emphasis of China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation will inevitably be transferred from the traditional security domain to the commercial trade domain.

Looking into the future, as long as the orientation of bilateral nuclear relation between China and Pakistan is clearly made, the nuclear cooperation between them will go deepening irreversibly due to the traditional basis of friendly bilateral cooperation and the constant practical cooperation in specific areas. With China's overall integration into the international nuclear nonproliferation regime, China's foreign nuclear cooperation will also be accepted by the international community more and more. At the same time, after Pakistan became the de facto nuclear countries, its nonproliferation policy have continued to be changed in a meaningful way and its image of proliferation will also slowly get changed. Therefore, the external environment for China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation will be improved. The benign interaction between China Pakistan nuclear relation and international nonproliferation regime will not only be in favor of enhancing the bilateral nuclear relation in itself forward, but also produce an active and far-reaching influence on the integral nuclear relations of the whole Asian region.