

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Contemporary Challenges & Prospects

One Day International Seminar

Concept Note

Organized by



CPGS

Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies

مرکز دراسات پاکستان والخليج

INNOVATING FUTURE

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Much has changed since the Cold War ended about two and a half decades ago. The international system has transformed from a bi-polar world order into a multi-polar one, with different power centers emerging in different regions. The bi-polarity, demonstrated in an almost equal military balance or power to inflict damage, and the advent of nuclear weapons maintained an overall environment of relative peace in the Cold War era.¹ However, the emergence of new states in the post-Cold War period with dynamic economic, military and cultural power challenging the traditional power centers has shaped a complex world order, more prone to conflict than the bipolar structure of Cold War. In this new international system, there are multiple contending forces with different ideologies, strategic cultures, and often clashing geopolitical interests, which are in a constant state of competition.

Nuclear weapons play a vital role in shaping international politics today, especially in the three main conflict-prone regions – the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. In this order of competition, the prospects of the spread of nuclear weapons increase. As a matter of fact, in the contemporary international political environment, nuclear weapons have become deeply entrenched in the foreign security policies of states.

In the Middle East, the presence of Israel with its 200 nuclear weapons provides the 'legitimacy' and space for any contending state to follow route. Iran's alleged nuclear weapon aspirations and its uranium enrichment program is a point of concern for other regional players, who in turn are also likely to follow suit should Iran acquire a nuclear weapon. Despite the fact that Iran has agreed on an interim agreement during negotiations with P5+1, the chances of military confrontation between Iran and Israel remain pervasive should the P5+1 fail to conclude a final agreement in the next six months. As Israeli Prime Minister stated soon after the agreement, Israel is not bound by any agreement between Iran and P5+1. Moreover Israel is not the only country in the region that is dubious of Iranian compliance with the interim agreement; regional powers like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States are also doubtful of the outcome. It is naive to think that these states do not have contingencies in place for developing or acquiring nuclear weapons should Iran not live up to the terms it has agreed on.

In South Asia, a nuclear arms race is in the process of maturing between India and Pakistan and there are indicators that this race may soon turn into a full blown nuclear arms competition. While there are fewer chances of horizontal proliferation in South

¹ John J. Mearsheimer, Back to the Future, Instability in Europe after the Cold War, International Security, summer 1990.

Asia given the fact that both states have put in place stringent legal, physical and procedural measures, the prospects of vertical proliferation do exist in both states. If the two keep moving along the path of military competition rather than opting for preventing arms race instability, crisis instability and agreeing on some plausible conflict prevention mechanisms, the chances of an unwanted nuclear exchange will rise.

In East Asia, the unfolding geopolitical realities are changing the strategic environment of the region. Heavy US presence in the region and the consequently rapidly modernizing Chinese conventional and strategic forces are shaping an environment of military competition. In this environment, it is possible that countries with advanced nuclear power capacities may choose to go nuclear at short notice. Regional and global developments like the nuclear tests conducted by North Korea and China's ongoing military modernization have also raised new questions about Japan's vulnerability to potential adversaries, thereby increasing the prospects for it developing independent nuclear deterrent capability.

Moreover in the backdrop 9/11, the issue of nuclear security has become a major international concern. Developments since that historic event have given birth to various inexorable assumptions i.e. the potential interest of various global terrorist organizations in acquiring radioactive or fissile material, illicit trafficking of nuclear material, components and technology, and security vulnerabilities of nuclear installations and storage facilities across the globe.

Nuclear non-proliferation sets out three main objectives; nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Four decades since the signing and ratification of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) by most countries, the prospects for achieving abovementioned objectives remain vague. Does the nuclear non-proliferation regime still matter or has it become less relevant in this new era of multi-polarity? Are the two major nuclear powers - the US and Russia - serious about eliminating their nuclear weapons, thereby setting the precedence for smaller nuclear states to follow suit? And finally, what are prospects for a nuclear energy renaissance? These questions, though not new, are at the heart of nuclear debate in what some theorists have termed it as 'the Second Nuclear Age'.

In this context, the Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies has taken the initiative to organize a One Day International Seminar under its mega project 'Contemporary Nuclear Debate in the Second Nuclear Age' to understand the evolving dynamics around this important and complex international issue and to find appropriate answers to the abovementioned questions.

The Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies is a non-partisan platform established to undertake studies, policy research, advocacy and consultancy to enhance understanding and relations in diverse fields between Pakistan and the Gulf countries. The Centre has been instituted to harness mutual potential for cooperation to attain peace, security, economic development and to assess emerging trends and to devise strategies for possible future challenges. This institution is working for promoting regional harmony, global peace, security and stability by making substantive intellectual, academic and diplomatic contribution.

Aim and Objective

The seminar aims at understanding the evolving dynamics of the debate regarding nuclear non-proliferation in this era of multi-polarity. The goal is to devise a better understanding of the challenges and prospects through converging and synthesizing different perspectives and approaches. A proper comprehension of this multifaceted issue would help to align the nuclear debate in this part of world in a more productive and coherent fashion.