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Report – Panel Discussion

“The Myth of India’s Impeccable Nuclear Non-Proliferation Record”

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The Arms Control and Disarmament Centre (ACDC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a panel discussion on “**The Myth of India's Impeccable Nuclear Non-Proliferation Record,**” on July 15, 2021. The panel discussion was attended by various distinguished national and international experts and moderated by Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director, ACDC-ISSI.

While presenting an introduction of the webinar, Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director, ACDC-ISSI said that recent incidents of uranium theft in India in May and June 2021, where the Indian authorities have arrested several people for possessing and planning to sell around 13 kilogrammes of uranium have raised several questions and concerns. Dozens of similar nuclear proliferation and theft incidents have already happened in India such as illicit heavy water acquisitions, centrifuge know-how leakage, illicit procurements and diversion of international peaceful cooperation for weapons use, etc. These incidents question the credibility of India's nuclear regulatory regime; safety and security of its nuclear assets and double standards of the international community for always giving a clean chit to India by granting it waivers and signing nuclear cooperation agreements.

While welcoming the guests, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI, stated that besides nuclear proliferations incidents, the recent doctrinal shifts on the Indian side provides an opportunity for Pakistan to enlighten the international community regarding the irresponsible behaviour of nuclear India.

Ms Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, Research Fellow ACDC-ISSI, briefed the panellists about the history of Indian nuclear proliferation, safety and security record over the last four decades. She said that it is important to identify whether these recent incidents are isolated events or continuations of previous events. According to the Indian Parliamentary Report, 147 safety and security related mishaps were reported in Indian atomic energy plants between 1995 and 1998. Out of these 28 were of acute nature and nine occurred in nuclear power installations. In addition to these reported cases, there could be many unreported cases. These events give rise to several concerns like the presence of a nuclear mafia, organised crime related to nuclear materials, malicious use of nuclear material. According to the Nuclear Threat Initiative Index (NTI), India ranked third among twenty-five countries and it was only above Iran and North Korea. It also observed that

India's nuclear stockpiles are continuously growing. Some previous activities include illicit heavy water acquisitions, centrifuge knowledge leakage, illicit procurements and diversion of international peaceful cooperation for weapons use, black diamond incident. Despite all these activities, India is being granted wavier and signing civil nuclear deals with other countries like Australia, Japan, etc. The US is also lobbying for the Indian membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

After the briefing by Ms Jalil, the formal panel discussion started and the following questions were raised:

Q: How do you view India's nuclear safety and security record and is the existing regulatory regime of India flawed?

While responding to this question, Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Professor, School of Politics & International Relations at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad said that the Indian nuclear safety and security regime should be analysed from three levels of analysis that exists in the theoretical discourse of International Relations. At the national or domestic level, it has been already established that the nuclear trafficking network is functional in India. The Indian media and the strategic community are trying to create confusion by using the term "natural uranium." However, the Bhabha Atomic Centre declared the stolen uranium as a "toxic material." These theft incidents and conflicting accounts about the nature of material proved that there are structural deficiencies at the domestic/national level in India.

Brigadier (Retd.) Dr Naeem Salik, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for International Security Studies (CISS), Islamabad said that nuclear security is a national responsibility. As far as the regulatory regime is concerned, India is a signatory to the Nuclear Safety Convention. India signed it in 1994 but waited for ten years to verify it. This convention requires the country to establish an autonomous nuclear regulatory authority. India does not have an independent regulatory authority, which does not comply with the convention. India's existing regulatory authority is part of its nuclear energy commission. Previously, India has tried to introduce legislation to change this mechanism during Man Mohan Singh's government. However, this bill stayed in the Lok Shaba for two years until it was allowed to lapse in the next Modi government. Modi has never pursued this bill ever since. This indicates a non-serious attitude on the part of

the Modi regime towards the establishment of an independent regulatory authority in India. Another significant aspect is the establishment of the Central Industrial Force – a third line force responsible for the protection of India's overall industrial units. A similar force is being used for the security of Indian nuclear installations. The absence of a dedicated nuclear security force in India has led to such mishaps.

While reiterating the views of the earlier speakers, Ambassador Zamir Akram, Advisor Strategic Plan Division (SPD), said that the nuclear black market that exists in India is a matter of concern. The ultimate goal or core objective of that nuclear black market should be explored deeply. Some incidents are in public knowledge but others are not. The failure of the Indian nuclear establishment to exercise complete control over its nuclear supply chain is a major concern to be focused on. While talking about the Indian safety and security regime, he said that the post-NSG wavier safeguard arrangement that has been accepted by India for the transfer of fissile material, nuclear-related systems transfers are extremely loose arrangements between India and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Due to its several lacunas, it is termed the “Micky Mouse” arrangements. There are three streams in the Indian nuclear programme: i) weapon stream; ii) civilian programme; iii) central or overlapping stream between weapon and civilian streams. Therefore, there are chances that the fissile material for civilian use could be proliferated to the weapons programme. The fact remains that largely these incidents have not caused any reaction in the West that makes this matter more political rather than legal and technical.

Syed Muhammad Ali, Director Nuclear & Strategic Affairs at Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad said that the Indian nuclear programme must be understood within the broader strategic framework that includes various factors like technical, legal, political, capacity, size, posture, safety and security, strategic ambitions, political and military leadership. Together, all these factors define Indian nuclear behaviour. While reinforcing the views of Ambassador Akram, he said that India's strategic ambitions and the technical reality should be seen and understood in terms of international politics. He highlighted eight factors that indicate irresponsible nuclear behaviour by India.

1. India is the only nuclear-armed state that is ruled by an extremist political ideology. Therefore, all these nuclear mishaps, military aggression and irresponsible decision making indicate the domination of this extremist mindset.
2. The size of the Indian nuclear programme is large to an extent that it has been declared as the largest nuclear programme of the developing world. Consequently, the size or number of un-safeguarded nuclear installations will also be the largest in the developing world.
3. The growth pace of the Indian nuclear programme is fast.
4. The Indian nuclear posture is also expanding becoming more alert and aggressive.
5. The extensive and rich history of lying, diversion, accidents including nuclear submarines, nuclear theft and smuggling paints a worrisome picture and proves that the Indian nuclear culture is flawed and irresponsible to its core.
6. The poor security systems where the people who were responsible for the security worked against the system.
7. Attention should be paid to the possible nexus with the global nuclear black market.
8. The exceptional international access and cooperation after the NSG waiver with more than a dozen deals, offering them fuel and technology. This waiver and deals are exceptional in the developing world.

Q: Why international community is not condemning these incidents and putting pressure on India to improve its nuclear safety and security regime?

While responding to this question, Dr Jaspal said that favouring India is not new. Pakistan has been witnessing this discrimination since 1947. In the last two years, India went for border conflict or near warlike situation with two regional nuclear-armed states Pakistan and China, however, the media houses and think tanks in the West did not produce any document or report on India. Furthermore, the West is ready to sell a large number of weapons and advance military technologies to India instead of putting sanctions. In realpolitik, states play for their interests. The international strategic landscape is discriminatory and states have to live with it.

Ambassador Akram said that a single-word answer to this question is “geopolitics.” The geopolitics and mutual interest of the US and India to counter China is the factor that lies at the heart of Western ignorance. Historically, India claimed that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes and advocated for nuclear disarmament but the Indian nuclear weapon programme was never a hidden matter. When China tested its nuclear weapons, there was a strong lobby in the US that promoted the narrative of helping India to develop its nuclear weapons against China. Therefore, the acceptance of Indian nuclear weapons is being there for a long time. Furthermore, the US went against its laws to benefit India in the NSG waiver case. Despite several Indian business organisations are under the US sanctions, the US has never criticised India for its bad nuclear safety and security record.

While talking about the non-proliferation record of India, Dr Tariq Rauf said that India used training from the US labs for weapons programme, diversion of materials from the civilian programme and replicating the design of civilian nuclear plants illegally for plutonium production. Furthermore, the heavy water reactor built in India indigenously is an illegal copy of the nuclear power plant in Rajasthan. From the nuclear security aspect, Pakistan could highlight that this creates a problem concerning the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540 that is preventing access to the components of weapons of mass destruction to non-state actors. These incidents are also against India's obligation under the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials (CPPNM). Other areas of the Indian dismal non-proliferation record are misuse of the Cray supercomputers for a nuclear weapons programme, designs, calculations and ballistic missiles. They also misused the Cryogenic engines for space vehicles and used them for the development of their ballistic missile system. There is information that India was the supplier to both Iraq and Iran as a part of the nuclear supplier network. India is the leader of ballistic and cruise missile proliferation. Finally, India does not have an independent nuclear regulatory authority like Pakistan. There are many areas where India is deficient and Pakistan can highlight these shortcomings from a much stronger ground.

PICTURES OF EVENT



