

## DISCRIMINATORY U.S. SANCTIONS AND FALLACIOUS ASSERTIONS ON PAKISTAN'S MISSILE PROGRAMME – DYNAMICS AND IMPLICATIONS

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On December 18, 2024, the U.S. imposed sanctions on four Pakistani entities. The statement issued by the U.S. Department of State alleged that these entities had contributed to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. These sanctions, issued under Executive Order 13382, “target” proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.<sup>1</sup> The Pakistan Foreign Office reacted strongly to the U.S. announcement, describing the sanctions as “discriminatory” that not only “undermine the credibility of non-proliferation regimes but also endanger regional and international peace and security.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer, while speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, stated that Pakistan’s conduct raised “real questions” about the aims of its ballistic missile programme. Further, he said, “Candidly, it’s hard for us to see Pakistan’s actions as anything other than an emerging threat to the

<sup>1</sup> “U.S. Sanctions on Four Entities Contributing to Pakistan’s Ballistic Missile Program,” US Department of State Factsheet, December 18, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-sanctions-on-four-entities-contributing-to-pakistans-ballistic-missile-program/>

<sup>2</sup> “Pakistan’s reaction to the imposition of US sanctions on National Development Complex and three commercial entities” Press Release 221/2024, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 19, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/pakistans-reaction-to-the-imposition-of-us-sanctions-on-national-development-complex-and-three-commercial-entities>

**United States.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to examine the nature of the U.S. sanctions, their particular timing, the extraordinary claims made by Jon Finer, and the implications for Pakistan of U.S. actions and statements.**

### **Sanctions**

The sanctions were imposed on National Development Complex (NDC), Affiliates International, Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, and Rockside Enterprise. The sanctions purport to freeze any U.S. assets belonging to these entities and prohibit U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with them. Jon Finer had further asserted that “Pakistan has developed increasingly sophisticated missile technology, from long-range ballistic missile systems to equipment that would enable the testing of significantly larger rocket motors.”<sup>4</sup> He claimed that “Pakistan will have the capability to strike targets well beyond South Asia, including in the United States.”<sup>5</sup> Jon Finer’s talk came just a day after the U.S. State Department announced this round of sanctions related to Pakistan’s ballistic missile development programme.

### **Pakistan’s Stance**

The Pakistan Foreign Office denounced the sanctions in the strongest terms, calling them “unfortunate and biased.” It underscored that “Pakistan’s strategic capabilities are meant to defend its sovereignty and preserve peace and stability in South Asia.”<sup>6</sup> It further underlined that the latest round of sanctions “defies the objective of peace and security by aiming to accentuate military asymmetries. Such policies have dangerous implications for strategic stability of our region and beyond.”<sup>7</sup> Underscoring the hollowness of U.S. assertions and the discriminatory approaches adopted by the U.S. on the issue, the Foreign Office added: “Similar listings of commercial entities in the past were based on mere doubts and suspicion without any evidence whatsoever. While claiming strict adherence to non-proliferation norms, licensing requirement for advanced military technology to other countries have been waived off in the past.”<sup>8</sup> The U.S. waivers for India are clearly being referred here.

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<sup>3</sup> “In Conversation with Jon Finer: Recent Developments in the Biden Administration's WMD Policies,” December 19, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2024/12/in-conversation-with-jon-finer-the-biden-administrations-nuclear-weapons-policy?lang=en>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Press Release 221/2024

<sup>7</sup> Press Release 221/2024

<sup>8</sup> Press Release 221/2024

In a second statement the Foreign Office further reiterated that “Pakistan’s strategic capabilities are meant to defend its sovereignty and preserve peace and stability in South Asia. Pakistan cannot abdicate its right to develop capabilities that commensurate with the need to maintain credible minimum deterrence as well as evolving and dynamic threats.”<sup>9</sup> Pakistan has always maintained that its primary security threat comes from its eastern neighbor India, and not from the West. There is no logic or foundation to Jon Finer’s claims that Pakistan’s long range missile programme may target the U.S. Pakistan has never perceived a threat from the U.S. The Foreign Office emphasized that its strategic capabilities were solely for defending its sovereignty and maintaining regional stability, and should not be perceived as a threat to any other country. Foreign Office stated: “Any irrational assumption of a hostile intent from Pakistan by any other country including the U.S. is perplexing as well as illogical.”<sup>10</sup> There is, thus, a question mark over the timing and motives behind sanctions and Mr. Finer’s assertions.

As hinted in the Foreign Office statement, the sanctions seem to be politically motivated. Diplomatic sources in Washington suggested that Mr. Finer’s statement may have been intended to increase pressure on Pakistan, likely at India’s behest.<sup>11</sup> This is not the first time sanctions have been imposed. The Biden Administration has imposed sanctions six times during its term. India has also used these sanctions as an excuse to harass Chinese and Pakistani companies doing documented trade. Earlier, in March 2024, India intercepted a merchant ship carrying cargo for Cosmos Engineering, Karachi, a manufacturer of automobile parts and home appliances with allegation that it was carrying dual-use military equipment, with potential use in Pakistan’s weapons programme. They confiscated it and have not released it to date. Neither have they shared any evidence to substantiate their claim.<sup>12</sup> These interceptions and claims by India were meant to malign Pakistan and put pressure on it.

### Double Standards

Pakistan’s missile programme is indigenous, and designed to serve its deterrence imperatives. The U.S. sanctions will have negligible effect on its programme. As Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, former Ambassador to the U.S. aptly put it: “The U.S. has been imposing restrictions ever since Pakistan began its nuclear programme. Their attempts were to shut down Pakistan’s nuclear programme or

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<sup>9</sup> “Statement by the Spokesperson,” December 21, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/statement-by-spokesperson>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> “Shocking US claim on reach of Pakistani missiles,” *Dawn*, December 20, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1879882/shocking-us-claim-on-reach-of-pakistani-missiles>

<sup>12</sup> “How India’s exploitation of US sanctions hurts Pakistani businesses”, December 20, 2024, *Dawn*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1879874/how-indias-exploitation-of-us-sanctions-hurts-pakistani-businesses>

to completely weaken it so that Pakistan wouldn't develop missiles. Their policy regarding Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme has been completely unsuccessful."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, given that Pakistan's programme is indigenous, the sanctions will not have any significant effect.

Furthermore, the U.S. policy towards Pakistan on the issue remains biased and discriminatory. Pakistan's neighbour, India, has a missile programme that is far more extensive and advanced. India has been developing its missile programme at a fast pace. India has conducted several significant missile tests in 2024, including Agni-P, Agni V missile, a Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) with 5000 km range<sup>14</sup> in March, and Hypersonic missile test in November that only a handful of states possess globally. India is also developing Agni VI with 8000 km range or more. Realistically, India's array of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), MIRV technology and hypersonic missiles are likely to pose greater threat to the U.S. than any of Pakistan's missiles will ever be able to. India also has ballistic missile defence systems which has components that are derivatives of Israel's defence systems that required U.S. approval for transfer to another country. Also, India has acquired a number of Russian S-400 missile defence systems. The S-400 was set to be sanctioned under the U.S. law 'Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act' (CAATSA) that imposes sanctions on countries doing defence procurements from Russia. However, those sanctions were never applied to India.

In addition, the growing India-U.S. strategic partnership ensures steady transfer of high-end defence technologies to India. These include advanced missile systems, high technology, aided by foundational agreements such as the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) which entails exchange of geospatial information, crucial for the precise use of military technologies like missiles and drone, and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) envisages collaboration in intelligence-sharing and military operations enhancing interoperability of forces. India and the U.S. are also pursuing joint missile development, the co-production of systems under the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). There is further defence and technology collaboration under the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). The U.S.-India collaboration builds India's military capabilities, provides crucial intelligence-sharing that accentuates asymmetries in South Asia, and is inherently destabilizing. Yet, not an eyebrow is raised in Washington or elsewhere in the West.

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<sup>13</sup> "US sanctions won't impact Pakistan's missile programme: ex-envoy," Dawn, December 20, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1879942/us-sanctions-wont-impact-pakistans-missile-programme-ex-envoy>

<sup>14</sup> Please see for details Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "Dynamics and Implications of India's MIRV Development" March 22, 2024, <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-dynamics-and-implications-of-indias-mirv-development/>

## Conclusion

The U.S. sanctions are discriminatory and reek of double standards. It is ironic that India's fast-paced missile programme is perceived to be posing no threat to the U.S., while Pakistan's modest missile programme has been projected by a U.S. official as a 'threat.' This is not the first time the U.S. has imposed sanctions on Pakistan, and it will probably not be the last. However, the sanctions will not have any impact on Pakistan's indigenous missile programme that is only aimed at maintaining credible deterrence against its hostile neighbor. Pakistan has never had any ambitions to develop a missile capability beyond its legitimate security needs vis-a-vis its Eastern neighbour. Thus, U.S. concerns and claims that it may threaten Washington are totally unfounded and without logic. The growing U.S.-India strategic partnership, on the other hand, is a threat that contributes to accentuating asymmetries in South Asia. The U.S. continues to ignore Pakistan's legitimate security concerns vis-a-vis India. The increased pressure on Pakistan is ultimately part of a larger geo-political chessboard that is destabilizing for the region and for the world.