



CLAWS

Nawaz Sharif Assures Pak's Nuclear Safety at UN

■ Dr. Monika Chansoria

Nawaz Sharif's Address to General Assembly, UN

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif delivered an address to the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on September 26, 2014. The timing of the UNGA meet was critical given that Sharif realised that he stood disposed to unending pressure back home in the backdrop of mass street protests in Islamabad, stretching till Karachi. The protests were led by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Party and Islamic cleric Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri's Pakistan Awami Tehreek, with both Khan and Qadri declaring that they no longer recognised the legitimacy of Pakistan's Parliament and called for PM Sharif to resign. As the mass protests mounted, Pakistan appeared a nation under siege with Nawaz at the centre of the storm.

It appeared that Nawaz Sharif's address to the UNGA was directed towards the international audience and also catered to his domestic turf in the midst of mounting political instability. What perhaps stood out most strikingly was when Sharif dedicated a substantial share of his address assuring that Pakistan is a responsible nuclear weapon state. However, he also stressed upon pursuing a policy of nuclear restraint while ensuring a credible minimum

deterrent. "Pakistan is not participating in any arms race in the region, yet we cannot be oblivious to the emerging security scenario and the build-up of armaments. We too, have the obligation to maintain a robust and reliable deterrent," stated Sharif. He went on to reassure that Pakistan has a stringent national export control system, fully harmonised with the international export control regimes.

While Nawaz Sharif attempted to persuade and seek greater credibility in so far as Pakistan's nuclear safety and weapon's security is concerned, the internal problems grappling Pakistan are far too severe to be ignored or negated. A severe economic crunch coupled with an armed extremist insurgency, amidst a spectre of terrorism has often initiated a debate whether Pakistan's nuclear warheads are actually safe from falling into fundamentalist/*jihadi* hands. The security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other tribal regions in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), creeping Talibanisation, and continuing radical extremism are dangerous portents despite the statement that "Pakistan has maintained the highest standards of nuclear safety and security," made by Sharif at the UNGA.

It is imperative for Pakistan's nuclear authorities to come clean on the system

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of checks and balances instituted by them. These organisations include the National Command Authority (NCA) – responsible for policy formulation and control over all strategic nuclear forces, the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) – in charge of developing and managing nuclear capability in all dimensions, and the Strategic Forces Command – responsible for planning and control as well as for issuing operational directives for the deployment and use of nuclear weapons. While the argument that as of today, the Pakistan Army is in firm control of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal can be accepted, at least at face value, though it needs to be equally reinforced that as a nation, Pakistan is in dire straits. Former IAEA Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei had expressed apprehension that a radical regime could take power in Pakistan and attempt acquiring nuclear weapons. Besides, it could well be the case that while nuclear weapons are currently under firm control, with warheads disassembled, technology might be sold off by insiders during a worsening crisis. A facet that warrants special mention is regarding separate storage and the weapon's fissile material core (if not assembled) falling into wrong hands. Dispersal of these assets paves way for greater number access points and for their potential acquisition, thereby increasing the risk of diversion.

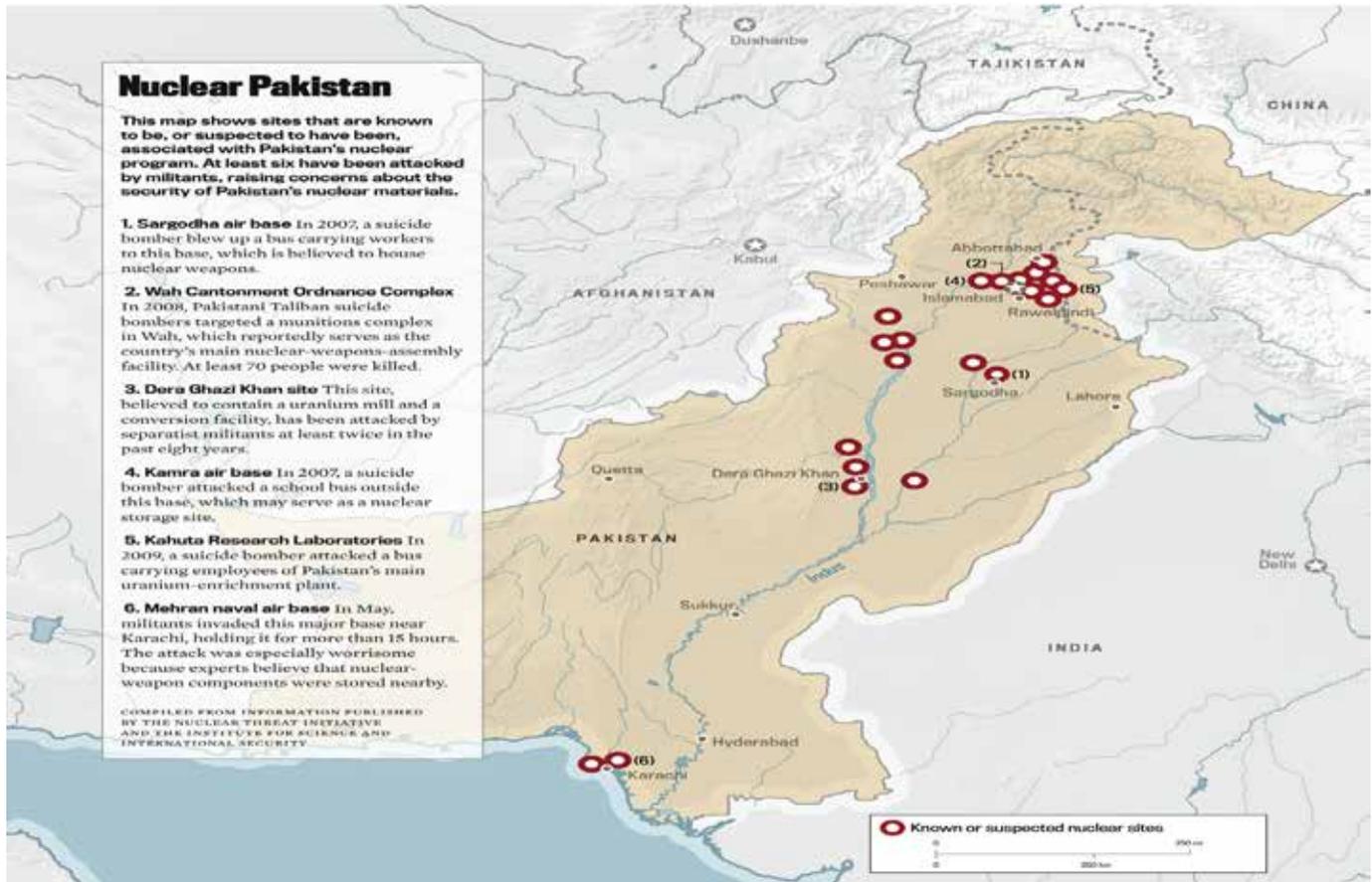
Vulnerability of “Secure” Military Installations

Sharif, interestingly, took the opportunity of being at the United Nations platform in order to make a pitch for Pakistan becoming part of the export control regimes, especially the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and advocated that Pakistan qualifies for full access to civil nuclear technology to overcome energy shortages and spur economic growth. By co-relating and seeking parity

to India's eventual admission to the NSG, Pakistan conveniently chooses to overlook India's spotless non-proliferation record and the credibility of an indigenous nuclear and missile programme – much in contrast to its own. In the absence of a NSG exemption, Pakistan's only source for nuclear commerce remains China. More importantly, the clandestine manner of China's supply of unsafeguarded natural uranium for Pakistan's plutonium production reactors and Khushab is likely to continue undisrupted.

The change of guard in the Strategic Plans Division in December 2013 marked the end of a very long stint in office for Lt Gen Khalid Ahmed Kidwai (heading SPD since its inception in 1999). Kidwai became nearly synonymous with Pakistan's nuclear weapons and management of its strategy. The Nawaz Sharif government, in one of its more hushed moves replaced Kidwai with Corps Commander Bahawalpur, Lt Gen Zubair Mahmood Hayat who now faces testing times in terms of reorienting the organisation. According to strategic analyst, Lt Gen Talat Masood, fears of nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands was always there, but people do not really understand Pakistan and equate the nuclear with the conventional weapons set-up. It has been reported that Pakistan is taking steps to update its nuclear security regulations and implement nuclear security best practices. In particular, new regulations have improved its scores in the On-Site Physical Protection indicator. Echoing similar moves, Nawaz Sharif stated that at the last summit at The Hague attended by him, Pakistan's recent nuclear measures especially establishment of a centre of excellence were appreciated.

That said, there is enough work that Pakistan needs to do in terms of security transparency, safekeeping and precautions as far as sensitive technologies are concerned. Repeated incidents of militant attacks



Source: Cited in *The Atlantic*, December 2011, based on data provided by the Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Institute for Science and International Security

on high security Pakistani military installations have raised apprehensions in the security set up. These include, the brazen October 2009 attack targeting Pakistan's most secure military complex, the Army Headquarters (GHQ) in garrison city Rawalpindi, just a few miles away from the capital of Islamabad GHQ and the police training school. Another daring attack came in form of the PNS Mehran Naval base strike in May 2011, wherein militants from the Pakistan Taliban entered Mehran Naval Air Station and targeted two highly valued possessions – US-made P-3C Orion maritime surveillance planes. Armed with AK-47s, RPGs, hand-grenades and prepared for a long

standoff with food and water, the jihadists held off Pakistani naval and army commandos for nearly 16 hours before finally being overwhelmed. PNS Mehran is located merely 15 miles away from Masroor Air Base, reportedly the largest depot of Pakistani nuclear weapons. The Mehran base is among the two airbases of the Pakistan Navy and serves as the headquarters of PN aviation. Sharing the runway with the Faisal Air Base of Pakistan's Air Force, the base houses most of Pakistani Navy's aviation assets. It is hard to decipher how could this attack be planned and executed without any collusion from within, given that the militants knew the exact location of the Orions.

... Nuclear Safety at UN

IAEA Reviews Pakistan's Nuclear Regulatory Framework

In this reference, it is crucial to discuss the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Mission which concluded a peer review of Pakistan's Nuclear Regulatory Framework Authority (PNRA) in Islamabad in May 2014. Senior international nuclear experts concluded a 12-day Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS) mission of the IAEA reviewing Pakistan's regulatory framework for nuclear and radiation safety. The mission reviewed the effectiveness of the PNRA in regulating the safety of the use of nuclear and radioactive material. In principle, the IRRS missions review a broad spectrum of the nuclear legal and regulatory framework, resulting in recommendations to improve compliance with the IAEA safety standards and suggestions for further possible enhancement of the regulatory framework.

The IRRS Review team identified certain areas that require attention/improvement. These include, the IAEA Fundamental Safety Principles which need to be fully incorporated into Pakistan's safety framework; the primary responsibility for safety should be clearly assigned; the legal responsibilities and

obligations with respect to the financial provisions for the management of radioactive waste, spent fuel and decommissioning should be clearly stipulated; the National Radiation Emergency Coordination Centre at PNRA should be modernised; and regulations and regulatory guides that take the latest IAEA Safety Standards into account should be finalised and issued.

Observers have expressed concern that spent fuel from Pakistan's Karachi and Chasma nuclear power plants could be vulnerable to theft or attack – a claim contested by Pakistan since it maintains that the PNRA has a Nuclear Security Action Plan, which includes a description of regulations for handling spent nuclear fuel. Despite the assurances made by Islamabad vis-à-vis current levels of nuclear security and preventing further proliferation of nuclear-related technologies and materials, there are gaping loopholes in the system (especially in terms of susceptibility to an attack) which Pakistan is expected to plug effectively.



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