

Pakistan Nuclear Security: Threats from Non-State Actors

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Abstract : The recent rise of powerful terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda brings up concerns about nuclear terrorism as well as a focus on nuclear security, specifically the physical security of nuclear weapons and fissile material storage sites in countries where powerful nonstate actors are present. Particularly because these non-state actors, who lack their own sovereign territory, cannot be 'deterred' in the traditional sense. In light of the current threat environment, it's necessary to now rethink these strategies in the 21st century - a multipolar world with the presence of powerful non-state actors. As a country in the spotlight for its low ranking on the Nuclear Threat Initiative's (NTI) Nuclear Security Index, Pakistan is a relevant example to explore the question of whether the presence of non-state actors poses a real risk to nuclear security today. It's necessary to take a look at their nuclear security policies to determine if they're robust enough to deal with political instability and violence in the country. After carrying out interviews with experts in May 2017 in Islamabad on nuclear security and nuclear terrorism, this paper aims to highlight findings by providing a Pakistan-centric view on the subject and give experts there a chance to counter criticism. Western media would have us fearful of nuclear security mechanisms in Pakistan after reports that areas such as cybersecurity and accounting and control of materials are weak, as well as sensitive nuclear material being transported in unmarked, unguarded vehicles. Also reported are cases where terrorist groups carried out targeted attacks against Pakistani military bases or secure sites where nuclear material is stored. One specific question asked of each interviewee in Islamabad was Do you feel the threat of nuclear terrorism calls into question the reliance on deterrence? Their responses will be elaborated on in the longer paper, but overall they demonstrate views that deterrence still serves a purpose for state-to-state security strategy, but not for a state in countering nonstate threats. If nuclear security is lax enough for these non-state actors to get their hands on either an intact nuclear weapon or enough military-grade fissile material to build a nuclear weapon, then what would stop them from launching a nuclear attack? As deterrence is a state-centric strategy, it doesn't work to deter non-state actors from carrying out an attack on another state, as they lack their own territory, and as such, are not fearful of a reprisal attack. Deterrence will need to be addressed, and its relevance analyzed to determine its utility in the current security environment. The aim of this research is to demonstrate the real risk of nuclear terrorism by pointing to weaknesses in global nuclear security, particularly in Pakistan. The research also aims to provoke thought on the weaknesses of deterrence as a whole. Original thinking is needed as we attempt to adequately respond to the 21st century's current threat environment.

Keywords : deterrence, non-proliferation, nuclear security, nuclear terrorism

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