



## The U.S. and Pakistan: Allies, but no PALs

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The war in Afghanistan has created a real concern that a domestic political uprising in Pakistan could cause its nuclear weapons and materials to fall into the hands of pro-Taliban forces. In response to this concern, the U.S. has been mulling the option of giving Pakistan permissive action links (PALs), which are highly sophisticated electronic locks that prevent unauthorized individuals from detonating a nuclear weapon. The U.S. should not give Pakistan PAL technology.

"There are many downsides to giving Pakistan PAL technology," said John Isaacs, President of Council for a Livable World. "First and foremost, it would probably violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)."

The 1968 NPT, signed by 187 countries, prohibits the five recognized nuclear weapon states from assisting or encouraging any non-nuclear weapon state to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. PALs are an integral part of weapon design and supplying them to another state would thus be considered nuclear assistance. Pakistan, despite the fact that it possesses nuclear weapons, has not signed the NPT and is barred from receiving nuclear assistance.

Aiding Pakistan's nuclear program would also set a dangerous precedent for other nuclear weapon states who may want to engage in nuclear cooperation with proliferators. For instance, China could increase its nuclear cooperation with Pakistan, and Russia with India and Iran.

Currently, Pakistan is believed to possess enough fissile materials for between 30 and 50 nuclear bombs, and fissile cores are likely stored separate from other weapon components. This condition of separability in itself acts as a preventative measure against unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. PALs could simply give Pakistan an incentive to go ahead and maintain fully assembled nuclear weapons, and even to operationally deploy them, thereby increasing nuclear dangers in South Asia.

"The technology could make Pakistan less risk-averse with regard to weaponization and deployment," said Steve LaMontagne, a nonproliferation expert at the Center for Arms Control & Non-Proliferation. PALs also involve highly classified encryption technology and could give away sensitive information about the types of weapons in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Pakistan might therefore use PAL technology to derive some of the secrets of advanced nuclear weapon design in order to further its nuclear program.

"Instead of giving Pakistan PAL technology, the U.S. should focus on steps that promote political stability in Pakistan without violating the NPT, sacrificing U.S. nonproliferation goals, or furthering Pakistan's nuclear weapons program," LaMontagne added. "Our efforts should concentrate on economic assistance, humanitarian aid, and debt relief, but not on this type of nuclear cooperation."

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