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Issue Brief: Steps for Nuclear Stability in South Asia

Background:

As U.S. military action in Afghanistan to capture or destroy those responsible for the terrorist attacks of September 11 proceeds, it has raised concerns about the potential for destabilizing of the increasingly fragile Musharraf regime in Pakistan, and for greatly heightened tensions in Kashmir. The Indian-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir is a dangerous flashpoint in a region already fraught with problems, and between two enemies with known nuclear weapons capabilities. As part of the effort to include India and Pakistan in the Bush administration's coalition against terrorism, sanctions imposed on the two following their nuclear tests in May 1998 have been dropped. Sales of military equipment and dual-use technology - potentially of help to the two countries in developing their nuclear weapons programs - are now permitted. These policies, however, put at risk long term US non-proliferation goals in the region are at risk. President Bush and Secretary of State Powell should consider, instead, a series of policy options that will make the region more stable, and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict there, both in the short and long term.

Short Term Measures:

- The administration must be mindful of the possibility that a protracted bombing campaign in Afghanistan could lead to internal unrest in Pakistan, leaving the country's nuclear arsenal vulnerable to theft, transfer, or unauthorized use. The United States, therefore, should seek swift resolution to war in Afghanistan and encourage political stability in Pakistan.
- Given the current border clashes and upsurge in terrorist incidents in Kashmir, it is urgent that President Bush apply similar diplomatic pressure to support regional stability, similar to that which the administration is currently using to prevent an escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.
- The administration must build on previous confidence building measures negotiated between India and Pakistan forbidding attack on each other's nuclear facilities, and assist them in reducing the overt conflict between the two countries.
- Despite lifting the sanctions imposed on India and Pakistan in the aftermath of September 11, no 'dual-use technology' should be transferred to either country while they refuse to renounce nuclear weapons. Restraint should also be exhibited in U.S. arms transfers to the region while the military conflict continues.

Long Term Measures:

- The Bush Administration should encourage the Senate to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty at home and aggressively pressure India and Pakistan to do the same.
- The U.S. must encourage India and Pakistan to halt production of fissile material and pursue a regional framework in which the two countries could negotiate a bilaterally verifiable Fissile Material Cut Off treaty or agreement. President Bush can lead by example. As he implements his campaign pledge to dramatically cut US strategic nuclear forces, all retired fissile material should be transferred to civil stocks under international monitoring and safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- President Bush must make it clear that the US cannot and will not tolerate overt weaponization or deployment of nuclear weapons in the region. Neither will nuclear threats across the Kashmir 'line of control' be accepted. The administration should use all available influence to build a long-term political solution to the problem of Kashmir.

In order to further these goals, both short and long term, the U.S. can link compliance by India and Pakistan with this program to economic aid and trading partnership. The key part of the program will be lack of progress towards weaponization or deployment of nuclear forces in the region, and to continuing diplomatic progress on the path to lasting peace.

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