



**US-Pakistan Policy:
Addressing the Nexus Between Terrorism and Nuclear Proliferation**

By Sara M. Kupfer¹

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In the course of pursuing its war on terrorism, the United States has found itself allied with countries whose politics and policies can be less than savory. Ironically, turning a blind eye to these practices in favor of cooperation on terrorism can have a counter-productive effect on U.S. national security and efforts to protect the American people.

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship is perhaps the most glaring example. In its counter-terrorism efforts in the region, and particularly along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the Bush administration depends upon the cooperation of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf. Meanwhile, it has essentially accepted Pakistan's tight-lipped stance on the details of a global nuclear proliferation network led by Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan, and Musharraf's possible knowledge of it.

A review of recent analyses of the nuclear network paints a troubling picture. It is one in which the administration continues to reward Pakistan financially and diplomatically despite strong evidence of high-level Pakistani knowledge of the network and despite the apparent ties to or sympathies with Islamic fundamentalism of members of the Pakistani nuclear establishment.

This compartmentalized approach risks compromising overall national security. Catching Osama bin Laden and the border region militants is important to the war on terrorism, but by ignoring the dangers of nuclear proliferation in the region, the Bush administration ultimately is sabotaging its greater anti-terrorism efforts.

The Khan Network

On February 4, 2004, Abdul Qadeer Khan, the godfather of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, appeared on Pakistani national television and confessed that he had passed nuclear know-how and technology to countries such as Iran, North Korea, and Libya. Khan, who enjoys the status of a national hero in his country, accepted full responsibility for his actions, insisting that he acted entirely on his own and without the knowledge of the government. After Pakistani authorities questioned the scientist, President Musharraf pardoned him and put him under house arrest.

Musharraf has not allowed for an independent investigation into the military's role in Khan's proliferation activities, nor has he agreed to U.N. supervision of Pakistan's nuclear program. Under pressure from Washington, he has launched his own investigation into Khan's black market activities, but the investigation is surrounded by great secrecy. U.S. interrogators are not given access to Khan and others involved in the scandal. Hence, Pakistanis briefing the U.S. government about Khan's confessions can filter out inconvenient content.

What could Musharraf be hiding? Quite a lot, Pakistan correspondent Massoud Ansari recently argued in *The New Republic*: Musharraf had to pardon Khan not only to save his political skin but also to whitewash his own involvement in Khan's proliferation activities. Ansari explains: "High-level sources in the Pakistani government say Khan's daughter Dina possesses highly incriminating documents and audiotapes showing that senior army officials, including Musharraf himself, knew for years about Khan's nuclear black market. Dina, they say, has wielded these documents as a weapon, using them to prevent the Pakistani government from jailing her father."

According to Ansari, Musharraf suddenly ordered legal proceedings against Khan to be halted when he learned about Dina's possession of the documents. Quoting Pakistani intelligence officials, Ansari asserts that "some of the documents...contain the signatures of former top defense ministry officials."

Considering that Khan kept the Pakistani Foreign Office abreast of his travels, and that Pakistan's treasured nuclear scientists were being closely monitored by the government, few Pakistan analysts believe that the Pakistani civilian and military leadership was ignorant of Khan's proliferation activities.² Especially in the case of North Korea, the Pakistani government is likely to have been directly involved in Khan's dealings, since Pyongyang provided Islamabad with eagerly sought missile technology in exchange for Pakistani nuclear know-how. According

to India's South Asia Analysis Group, the Indian secret service also has evidence that for at least one of his meetings with Iranian intelligence officials and nuclear scientists in Dubai, Khan was accompanied by Lt Gen. Ehsan-ul-Haq, the director of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI).

By insisting that Khan acted on his own, Musharraf tries to give credence to his assertion that a wider investigation into Khan's network is unnecessary, and that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is now completely secured. It is clearly not in Islamabad's interest to make the details of Khan's nuclear proliferation network public, particularly because Pakistan continues to rely on the black market to acquire equipment for its own nuclear weapons program.³ By exposing all its sources for obtaining nuclear materiel, Islamabad would jeopardize its ability to maintain its nuclear weapons capabilities. Quite tellingly, Musharraf told the Pakistani media on February 5, 2004: "Even if for the sake of argument it is accepted that the government and the army were involved in the affair, do you think it will serve our national interest to shout about it from the roof-top?"

The Dichotomy of U.S.-Pakistan Relations

Despite the high stakes involved in the scandal, the Bush administration has been very protective of the Musharraf government. At a hearing of the House International Relations Committee at the end of March, John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, bluntly stated that there was "no evidence" that "top officials" in Pakistan took part in Khan's black market operations. Pressed by the question of whether the United States has asked for access to Khan, Bolton said, "We have not asked for access to Mr. Khan, nor do we think we should."

Most nonproliferation experts, however, believe that direct access to Khan would be crucial for accessing information about who possesses tradable nuclear materiel and to whom the materiel has been sold. It is very possible, for example, that nuclear materiel belonging to Khan's network is currently being stored in countries that are not even on the International Atomic Energy Agency's watch list.

Instead of pushing Pakistan to provide more information on Khan's illicit proliferation network, the U.S. government has given the country the status of a "major non-NATO ally" and an impressive aid package of \$3 billion over the next five years to reward Islamabad for its cooperation in the war against al Qaeda. In exchange, Musharraf is said to have acquiesced to the

presence of U.S. intelligence officers within the country's borders to help in the search for al Qaeda operatives.⁴

While capturing bin Laden would be a significant short-term tactical victory in the overall war on terrorism, the dangers emanating from Khan's nuclear proliferation network constitute an enormous long-term security threat to the United States and the rest of the Western world.

The Bush administration is selling America's security interests short when it comes to its alliance with Pakistan. In the end, the United States gets very little in return for its silence on the Khan scandal. Indeed, Pakistan has not proven to be overly cooperative in its counterterrorism campaigns. For example, Pakistan's military campaign in the remote tribal region of Waziristan only lasted until Secretary of State Colin Powell concluded his visit to the country last April. Since Powell's departure, the Pakistani military has not made any significant advances in this troubled region.⁵

The Bush administration's gamble that it can focus on dismantling al Qaeda before tackling the dangers emanating from a nuclear-armed Pakistan is a mistake. Indeed, the war on terror and the war on proliferation cannot be separated. The fact that members of the Pakistani nuclear establishment have apparent ties to Islamic fundamentalist groups or are sympathetic to the causes they espouse should ring alarm bells.

The Nuclear Establishment and Fundamentalism

Khan himself has long been known as a member of Lashkar-e-Toiba, a subsidiary of bin Laden's terrorist network.⁶ According to the French author Bernard-Henry Levy, who has traveled to and written extensively on Pakistan, Khan is not only a fierce nationalist but also "a fanatical Islamist who in his heart and soul believes that the bomb of which he is the father should belong, if not to the Umma [Islamic community] itself, at least to its avant-garde, as incarnated by al Qaeda."

Already twenty years ago, Khan was quoted as saying, "All western countries, including Israel, are not only enemies of Pakistan but in fact of Islam." The bomb, so his logic goes, exists to protect not only Pakistan's national borders but the entire Islamic world. According to the New York Times, a senior Pakistani politician recently overheard Khan saying that "giving technology to a Muslim country was not a crime." Similarly, in 2000, then Pakistan Army Chief

Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg commented that selling nuclear materiel to other Islamic states was a “respectable way of earning money.”

In late 2001, the CIA confirmed that two of Pakistan’s top nuclear scientists, Sultan Bashir Mahmood and Chaudhri Abdul Majid – who worked directly under Khan – met with bin Laden in Kabul a few weeks before 9/11.⁷ “It may be that A.Q. Khan & Associates already have passed bomb-grade nuclear fuel to the Qaeda, and we are in for the worst,” Paul Leventhal of the Nuclear Control Institute was recently quoted as saying in the New York Times.

According to an Associated Press investigation, Khan, accompanied by other high-level nuclear scientists and army officers, made repeated trips to uranium-rich countries in Africa – the last trip was as late as February 2002, a year after President Musharraf had declared that he had put a lid on Pakistani exports of nuclear technology and know-how. Khan built a hotel in Timbuktu where he held meetings with members of his international black market network. According to an Indian analyst, Khan financed the hotel partly with money that came from Osama bin Laden’s investments in the African mining industry.⁸

Moreover, radical religious leaders have referred to the Pakistani government’s controversial decision to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1999 as “high treason” and as a “non-Islamic action.” In fact, nuclear scientist Bashir Mahmood, a strong admirer of bin Laden, so heavily protested Pakistan’s ratification of the nonproliferation treaty that the United States became alarmed, and he ultimately was forced to retire from the Pakistani Atomic Energy Commission, which he headed at the time.

Khan, therefore, is not the only nuclear scientist with obvious sympathies to Islamist organizations. Hence, the possible threats emanating from Pakistan’s nuclear community are not adequately addressed simply by putting the father of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb under house arrest.

A Better Strategy

There are several measures the United States should employ in order to begin to fully dismantle A.Q. Khan’s extensive black market network and address the danger of nuclear proliferation to terrorists.

First, the United States must insist on a full investigation into the Khan network. As Leonard Weiss argues in the May/June issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Washington “should demand that Pakistan sign a verifiable agreement on its production of fissile

material and make its nuclear trading records transparent to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) so the world can know with whom they have been dealing. An interrogation of A.Q. Khan by the IAEA should be part of the deal. These conditions, if met, could enable the United States, in concert with its allies, to roll up much of the current black market in nuclear materials and equipment.”

Second, the United States needs to assist the Pakistani government in overseeing the movement of sensitive materiel within Pakistan and in making it more difficult to smuggle nuclear materiel out of the country. Indeed, Washington can draw on its experience with helping Russia safeguard its nuclear arsenal after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As with Russia, the United States could offer Pakistan full assistance in installing security and materiel-accounting devices at its nuclear weapons sites.

The United States could also demand that Pakistan put special tags on all of its nuclear-related materiel, which would enable Islamabad to locate its nuclear materiel instantaneously. A similar system was put in place in the 1980s between the United States and the Soviet Union after they had signed the arms limitation agreements.

Furthermore, Weiss suggests that Washington allocate more intelligence resources to monitor Pakistani exports and to put an interdiction system in place. As of now, Pakistan does not have an effective export control system, and its export control laws do not apply to some of the government entities through which Khan operated, though a step in the right direction has been taken recently by the Pakistani government.⁹

To comply with a recent UN Security Council Resolution calling upon Member states to strengthen controls over sensitive technologies, the Pakistani government introduced a bill in the National Assembly, which, if passed, would make the export of material and technologies related to nuclear and biological weapons punishable with up to 14 years in prison and provide for the establishment of a regulatory authority. It remains to be seen whether the bill can pass through the National Assembly and the Senate without any major amendments.

Third, Washington can employ a variety of economic tools in exchange for genuine Pakistani non-proliferation efforts. Joseph Cirincione, director for non-proliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, believes that the U.S. has much more leverage on Pakistan than the Bush administration claims to have. In particular, F-16 aircraft and continued U.S. financial aid are both things that Pakistan urgently wants and thus provide powerful

bargaining chips for the United States to use when demanding Pakistan's full disclosure of information on Khan's network.

Similarly, his colleague at Carnegie, Jon Wolfsthal, argues that the United States should pursue a similar policy toward Pakistan as it did toward Libya by tying economic incentives to the country's compliance with IAEA inspections. To this end, Washington could propose to lift U.S. tariffs on Pakistani textile exports, a measure from which Pakistan's domestic economy could benefit.

America's stakes in the Pakistani government's nuclear dealings are enormously high. Considering that some members of Pakistan's nuclear establishment are sympathetic to the cause espoused by violent Islamist organizations, the case of Pakistan well illustrates that the war on terrorism and the war on proliferation cannot be treated as two separate issues. Instead, the United States needs to fight the two wars simultaneously if it does not want to compromise its anti-terrorism efforts.

Sara Kupfer is a freelance writer based in Washington, DC.

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² See the Associated Press, April 17, 2004 "AP Investigation: Head of Pakistan's Nuclear Ring Made Repeated Visits to Uranium-Rich Africa" by Edward Harris and Ellen Knickmeyer; and The South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 960, March 24, 2004 "A.Q. Khan & Osama Bin Laden" by B. Raman.

³ Robert Einhorn, talk on Pakistan and Proliferation on February 27, 2004 at SAIS/Johns Hopkins University, sponsored by the South Asia Studies Program at SAIS.

⁴ Pakistan is vital to America's war on terrorism because top al-Qaeda operatives, and possibly even Osama bin Laden himself, are assumed to be hiding in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The U.S. government imposed sanctions on its former Cold War ally after Pakistan detonated its first nuclear test device in 1998. Shortly after September 11, 2001, however, Bush lifted most sanctions in exchange for Pakistan's cooperation to help fight al Qaeda. Moreover, the Bush administration rewarded Islamabad with a generous aid package for allowing the U.S. military to launch strikes from Pakistani soil during the war against the Taliban and to give an additional incentive for Islamabad to continue its support of America's anti-terrorism effort. In the aftermath of the A.Q. Khan scandal, numerous Pakistan experts have argued that the administration did not push for a thorough international investigation into Kahn's proliferation network because it did not want to jeopardize the U.S.-Pakistani anti-terrorism alliance. Moreover, some observers have argued that the United States did not want to push Musharraf too hard on the nuclear proliferation issue for fear of further weakening his political base, which has already been seriously challenged by radical Islamist groups. (See, for example, The Wall Street Journal, March 11, 2004 "Imperfect Ally: For U.S., Support of Musharraf Is Delicate Balance" by Jay Solomon and Zahid Hussain; The New Yorker, March 8, 2004 "Why is Washington Going Easy on Pakistan's Nuclear Black Marketers?" by Seymour M. Hersh; The New York Times, February 16, 2004 "Out of the Nuclear Loop" by Stephen P. Cohen).

⁵ See Defense News, May 3, 2004 "Lean on Pakistan: Pushing U.S. Aid Can Help Quash Proliferation."

⁶ See The Wall Street Journal, February 17, 2004 "Abdul Qadeer Khan" by Bernard-Henri Levy.

⁷ See Bernard-Henry Levi, *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?*, translated by James X. Mitchell (Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House, 2003), p. 407. See also the Washington Post, 12 December 2001 "Two Nuclear Experts Briefed Bin Laden, Pakistanis Say" written by Molly Moore and Kamran Kahn.

⁸ See the South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 960, March 24, 2004 "A.Q. Khan & Osama Bin Laden" by B. Raman.

⁹ See Defense News, May 3, 2004 "Lean on Pakistan: Pushing U.S. Aid Can Help Quash Proliferation."