



Pakistan: Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan Discusses Nuclear Program in TV Talk Show

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[From the "Islamabad Tonight" discussion program hosted by Nadeem Malik. Words within double slant lines as received in English.]

[Host Nadeem Malik] Pakistan owes its impregnable defense to a scientist called Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is our guest today.

[Malik] What difficulties were you facing when you started the nuclear program of Pakistan?

[Khan] //Industrial infrastructure// was nonexistent at that time in Pakistan. Immediately after the Indian nuclear tests in 1974, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto summoned a meeting of scientists in Multan to ask them to make a nuclear bomb. After the debacle of East Pakistan in 1971, Bhutto was extremely worried about Pakistan's security, as he knew that Pakistan had become very //vulnerable//. He removed Usmani when the latter told him that they could not go ahead with their plan of acquiring a nuclear bomb, because the basic //infrastructure// was not there. Usman was not wrong in his capacity. The Atomic Energy Commission was the only relevant institution at that time, but it lacked the required expertise. India's nuclear test in 1974 caused hysteria in Pakistan. I was in Belgium in 1971, when the Pakistan Army surrendered in the then East Pakistan and faced utmost humiliation. Hindus and Sikhs were beating them with shoes, and their heads were being shaved in the //concentration camps//. I saw those scenes with horror. When India tested its bomb in 1974, I was living in Holland and working in a //nuclear field//. It was a very useful field. At that time, there were only three countries in the world that could enrich uranium centrifugally. Though the United States, France, China, and Russia were leaders in uranium enrichment technology, they would use the //diffusion// method, instead of enriching it centrifugally. The centrifugal method of enrichment was being used only in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Holland."

[Malik] Who contacted you from Pakistan for this purpose?

[Khan] I was not contacted from Pakistan. After the Indian test in 1974, I thought I must approach Bhutto [Zulfikar] and tell him about my capability of making the bomb. Though it was a very rare technology, I had a firsthand experience of that technology and I knew

how it worked. I wrote a letter to Bhutto in September 1974, telling him that I had the required expertise. Bhutto's response was very encouraging, and he wrote me back after two weeks, asking me to return to Pakistan. I came to Pakistan in December 1974 to meet Bhutto. I briefed Munir Ahmed Khan and his team about the technology and asked them to start creating the //infrastructure// before returning to Holland. I came again in 1975. I used to come every year to meet my family in Karachi. Bhutto asked me to inspect the site in 1975 to check the progress if there was any, but it was disappointing to see that no progress had been made by that time. I told Bhutto that I had to return to Holland; however, he insisted that I could not go and was to stay here. I told him that I had a job there and I had to go. I told him that I could only provide some direction to local scientists. My daughters had their education in Holland, and my wife had to look after her elderly parents. I asked Bhutto to give me time to ponder and discuss with my wife. When I told my wife that we were not supposed to return to Holland, she was shocked and rejected the plan, saying a few moments later that because of my //credibility// of not lying, she felt I could have done something for my country. I said to her that I could claim without exaggeration that no one could do it for Pakistan but me. That is how she changed her mind and decided to stay in Pakistan. She said we could visit Holland as frequently as we liked."

[Malik]: "Whose decision was it to make the bomb?"

[Khan] It was Bhutto's decision.

[Malik] Who else was attending the meeting between Bhutto and you, when you were being asked to stay in Pakistan?

[Khan] General Imtiaz was accompanying Bhutto in that meeting, but when I finalized my decision and met Bhutto again, there were a few more officials with him, namely, Ghulam Ishaq Khan [former president] and Agha Shahi [former foreign minister].

[Malik] How did you gather the team for this program?

[Khan] It is a pity that we have so many educated people in this country but none of them is experienced. Our people lack the training in taking an initiative. Though there were foreign qualified persons available, they did not have the experience. No one had the courage to undertake this program. I had to pick qualified people from wherever I could find them. For instance, I picked men from the Atomic Energy Commission. I also picked some from the United Kingdom. I trained them all. It took us three years to build a proficient team.

[Malik] Where will the funding come from?

[Khan] We had very limited //funds//. I had written an article to tell that it was not an expensive program. Our annual budget was just \$20-25 million, with the help of which we searched a location for the program and sketched out a detailed map of the construction site. We purchased land from the local people. We hired scientists for the

program and started purchasing the required material from abroad and so on. Our total budget for 25 years was less than half the amount of 58 billion rupees given as loan by the previous government and which Pervez Musharraf had decided to write off in the end.

[Malik] So it all started in Kahuta.

[Khan] We had an office near Rawalpindi in the beginning. My colleagues advised me to shift the office to a better place, but I wanted to start the work without wasting time. There were some old sheds there, which were the property of the Royal Pakistan Air Force; we started our work there; however, we shifted our office to Kahuta after having selected the location.

[Malik] When did you develop the centrifuges?

[Khan] We started developing centrifuges in our Rawalpindi office. It was 6 April 1978 when we achieved our first centrifugal enrichment of uranium.

[Malik] Was it weapons-grade enrichment?

[Khan] No, it was of low grade; however, it was enough to confirm the //viability of the project//. We had become capable of //uranium enrichment// by that time.

[Malik] When did you come to believe that now you had the weapons-grade uranium?

[Khan] In Kahuta, we achieved 60 percent result in our enrichment program; it was a very difficult task though. We faced a lot of challenges in the ensuing stages but successfully managed to overcome them, and we had achieved 90 percent result in the //enrichment// program by the early 1983.

[Malik] So when was the bomb ready?

[Khan] It was ready by 1984. I wrote a letter to Gen Zia on 10 December 1984, telling him that the weapon was ready and that we could detonate it on a notice of one week.

[Malik] Why did you not decide to test that device as soon as it was ready?

[Khan] We were allying with the United States in the Afghan war. The aid was coming. We asked Gen Zia and his team to go ahead with the test, but they said they could not conduct the test as it would have serious repercussions. They argued that, since the United States had to overlook our nuclear program due to our support in the Afghan war, it was an opportunity for us to further develop the program. They said the tests could be conducted any time later.

[Malik] You had admitted in an interview that the Afghan war provided you an opportunity to develop and enhance the nuclear program.

[Khan] Yes, I maintain that the war had provided us with space to enhance our nuclear capability. The credit goes to me and my team, because it was a very difficult task, which was next to impossible. But given the US and European pressure on our program, it is true that had the Afghan war not taken place at that time, we would not have been able to make the bomb as early as we did.

[Malik] How did you develop your //supply chain//?

[Khan] Since I had been living in Europe for 15 years, I knew about their industry and suppliers very well. I knew who made what. People accuse me of stealing lists of European suppliers, but that is rubbish. I had a doctorate in engineering. I had a valuable job in Holland; I would travel from one corner of Europe to the other. I also knew the addresses of all the suppliers. When I came to Pakistan, I started purchasing equipment from them until they proscribed the selling of equipment to us. Then we started purchasing the same equipment through other countries, for example, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Abu Dhabi, and Singapore. They could not outmaneuver us, as we remained a step ahead always.

[Malik] Did you have support from the successive governments?

[Khan] Everyone had patriotic feelings for the nuclear program. No one had ever objected to the program. Benazir Bhutto had once advised to shift the //high enrichment// program into a lower gear to divert the US pressure. This was not her sole decision; Gen Mirza Aslam Baig [the then of Army chief] and all others were onboard. She said that if we were able to shift our enrichment program into lower gear, she could have convinced the United States to keep providing us with aid.

[Malik] Was that Benazir Bhutto's first government?

[Khan] Yes, that was her first government.

[Malik] So we suspended the high enrichment and switched over to low enrichment.

[Khan] This plan was still under consideration when President Bush stopped the aid to Pakistan.

[Malik] Was there any moment when you had to switch from //high enrichment// to low one?

[Khan] No, we never switched from high to low. We knew that it would have been very difficult for us to do so.

[Malik] Did you have the Army //support//?

[Khan] Yes, the Army has always supported the program. No one knew about the program in the beginning, except Gen Arif, not even the vice chief of Army staff. Gen

Arif was a member of the board, and he was very //supportive//. Gen Arif was a very sensible and a no-nonsense person. In fact, Gen Zia owed his unmitigated rule to Gen Arif.

[Malik] When did you begin the production of the delivery system?

[Khan] We had planned to start the missile program in 1981, because we knew that it was just a matter of time before we would acquire expertise in high enrichment -- the nuclear bomb. So the delivery system was needed then. Since Gen Zia was engaged in the Afghan war, he did not allow us to begin the missile program. We began the missile program in 1988. It was Benazir Bhutto's government.

[Malik] So it started after Gen Zia's plane crash.

[Khan] Yes, after Zia's plane crash. Gen Baig supported us a lot. We began our missile program by producing short-range missiles. I was the chief coordinator of the Khanpur Factory.

[Malik] Where did you manage to get the required know-how for the Khanpur Factory?

[Khan] It was our //joint venture// with China.

[Malik] M11 missile was produced there.

[Khan] Yes, M11 missile was produced there. The Chinese did not want to violate the MTCR [Missile Technology Control Regime], as they were internationally committed to it. The range of the missile was 500 km, but China kept the range at 290 km.

[Malik]: What about North Korea?

[Khan] Gen Waheed Kakar was the chief of staff during Benazir Bhutto's second government, and he was a very //powerful and patriotic// person. I said to Kakar that the missile being produced at Khanpur was of a low range, and we needed to have //long-range missiles// to reach the far-flung cities of India and to ensure our //deterrence//. I discussed the issue with Benazir Bhutto as well. She said if Kakar would approve, then we could cooperate with North Korea.

[Malik] Benazir Bhutto visited North Korea.

[Khan] Yes, she visited North Korea, but what Hussain Haqqani [present Pakistan ambassador to the United States] has said in his book is rubbish.

[Malik] Did you go to North Korea in 1994?

[Khan] Yes, I had a visit to North Korea to discuss missile technology. Then the North Koreans came to Pakistan and received money from Benazir Bhutto so that we could start the missile program.

[Malik] How costly was the deal?

[Khan] It was not that costly; I think it was hardly worth \$50 million.

[Malik] Did we transfer any nuclear technology to North Korea in exchange of the missile technology?

[Khan] No, we did not.

[Malik] Did you //frequently visit// North Korea?

[Khan] I have only been to North Korea twice -- in 1994 and 1999. In 1999, Gen Musharraf sent me along with Gen Iftikhar, who was the then chief of Air Defense Command. We were fighting India at Kargil, and we were in dire need of //antiaircraft missiles//. Musharraf said that we could purchase the missiles from North Korea. We went to North Korea and purchased 200 missiles from them.

[Malik] Did you ever provide any kind of technological help to North Korea?

[Khan] A North Korean team would visit the Kahuta plant during the same period, as our missile deal was taking place, and it was no secret. Gen Kakar knew about it; everyone knew about it. They would stay at a guest house in the vicinity of Kahuta plant, because we did not have any other nuclear facility and our missiles were also being manufactured there. We did not spend any additional amount on the missile program. The expense that was incurred on the missile program was that of the construction of prefabricated shades, which we would use in those missiles, and purchase of a few machines. The North Korean engineers would visit our director generals in their departments to observe different operations. But nuclear technology cannot be learned by visiting a nuclear site and observing a few machines.

[Malik] You were accused of having transferred nuclear //technology// to North Korea.

[Khan] These are just accusations. I cannot comment on this topic at the moment.

[Malik] What about Iran?

[Khan] Iran was interested in acquiring nuclear technology. Since Iran was an important Muslim country, we wished Iran to acquire this technology. Western countries pressured us unfairly. If Iran succeeds in acquiring nuclear technology, we will be a strong bloc in the region to counter international pressure. Iran's nuclear capability will neutralize Israel's power. We had advised Iran to contact the suppliers and purchase equipment from them.

[Malik] Were the suppliers same as yours?

[Khan] Yes. The Iranian officials would meet them in Dubai. We had told the Iranians that the suppliers were very //reliable//.

[Malik] Musharraf had stated in his book that P1 centrifuges were taken from Pakistan to North Korea.

[Khan] There are different stories behind this accusation. According to Musharraf, this event took place in 2001. Musharraf himself was the chief executive and the chief of staff. The Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] men performed their duties at the airport. If the material was being transported, then it meant it was being transported with Musharraf's consent.

[Malik] It means that it is true that the material was transported to North Korea?

[Khan] May be.

[Malik] This issue got magnified after George Tenet's visit to Pakistan during the Musharraf regime.

[Khan] According to Musharraf, Tenet had shown him //drawings// of P1 centrifuges. Those drawings did not carry my name or that of my laboratory, but Musharraf claims that he knew the drawings belonged to me. Is he a technician to the extent that he could figure out a P1 drawing? We had stopped the P1 production in 1983 and switched over to P2. Musharraf might have been an insignificant colonel at that time, who could not enter the Kahuta plant. He did not have even an iota of what a P1 drawing could have looked like, but, according to him, he knew it was P1. So it is ridiculous for Musharraf to claim that it was a P1 drawing.

[Malik] What about the why you appeared on television and gave //confessional statement//?

[Khan] Sometimes, a man can sacrifice a lot for his country. I had a lucrative job in Holland, which I left for my country.

[Malik] Were you pressured by Musharraf into giving the statement?

[Khan] Yes, they pressured and threatened me.

[Malik] What about Libya?

[Khan] Libya had purchased the equipment from the same suppliers.

[Malik] Were those suppliers recommended by you?

[Khan] Be it Libya, Iran, or Pakistan, the same suppliers were responsible for providing the material through the same third party in Dubai.

[Malik] Who was that third party in Dubai?

[Khan] It was a company with which we had established links when we could not receive the material from Europe. They were Sri Lankan Muslims.

[Malik] Was Abdullah Abdali's son also involved in this game?

[Khan] Abdali's son was a Malaysian. There was a company in Dubai that would manufacture parts for Libya.

[Malik] Many people fear that Pakistan's nuclear assets can fall into wrong hands.

[Khan] It is just propaganda by the West. Western journalists are very clever, and they publish anti-Pakistan articles.

[Malik] Is there any possibility of proliferation or leakage from our nuclear facility?

[Khan] No, it is all propaganda.

[Malik] How developed is our technology?

[Khan] My team was very competent. All of us had studied in a foreign land. We made it without any foreign help. That team is no more, and now the system is run by youngsters. I have not been in touch with that program for the last eight years.

[Malik] Was our technology good enough in 1998 when we conducted the tests?

[Khan] Yes, it was good enough.

[Malik] Do you think there is pressure on Pakistan to switch its high enrichment program to low one?

[Khan] All you need is to maintain some deterrence. If you believe that your deterrence is credible enough, then you do not need to produce infinite volume of weapons.

[Malik] Do you think we follow ethos of minimum credible deterrence?

[Khan] Yes, we do.

[Malik] How will you like to serve your nation in the future?

[Khan] My father was a teacher. I want to work in the education field. I was the project director of the GIK [Ghulam Ishaque Khan] Institute. I had contributed a lot to develop GIK. I made an institute of genetic engineering in Karachi, an institute for mental health

and a polytechnic institute in Mianwali. It is not difficult to come up with a useful educational policy.

[Malik] What Muslim ideology should we follow in Pakistan?

[Khan] Education should be our priority. Our society is a victim of degeneration. Pakistan was a much better country in 1952. The people were very nice and honest.

[Malik] Do you think our leaders are indifferent to the problem faced by the people?

[Khan] The leadership is drawing heavy loans from the IMF, which is matter of concern. IMF is dictating the government to increase the electricity tariff.

[Malik] How can Pakistan deal with this crisis?

[Khan] We have enormous resources, and manpower is the most important of all. We made possible what Western analysts had declared impossible for us.

[Malik] There has been no change in the previous government's policy about your house arrest.

[Khan] Yes, those policies are continuing because of the US pressure.

[Malik] What should be our attitude toward drone attacks?

[Khan] We cannot afford to confront the United States, but we have our sovereignty. Musharraf will sell Pakistani citizens in exchange for dollars.

[Malik] Do you have any message for the nation?

[Khan] They should work hard and be hopeful.

[Malik] Do you have any message for the leadership?

[Khan] They should make decisions independently.

[Malik] Do you think a trial should be held against Musharraf?

[Khan] Yes, a trial must be held against him. Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti's murder, Red Mosque operation, and Musharraf's action against the Supreme Court judges are just a few of his crimes.

[Malik] The radicals had reportedly made an attempt to attack nuclear installations?

[Khan] This is again nonsense. It is impossible to reach there. We had constructed the site in 1976, and ever since, we have maintained impregnable security around the premises.

[Malik] Thank you very much, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, for sparing your time for us. We pray for your good health and freedom.

[Khan] Thank you very much.

[Malik] This brings us to the end of our special program. Do send in your views at our e-mail address: islamabadtonight@aaj.tv.