

A.Q. Khan Speaks to Foreign Policy

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Articles & Testimony

The worst nuclear proliferator in history sounds off on his political ambitions.

Abdul Qadeer Khan is the father of Pakistan's nuclear program -- and, according to Washington officialdom, the architect of the greatest violation to the nuclear non-proliferation regime that the world has ever seen. Starting in the 1980s and continuing for roughly two decades, the nuclear scientist oversaw the transfer of crucial nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea. Khan, for his part, asserts that he was merely acting on the orders of the Pakistani government -- in this interview, he rejects criticism of his actions as an example of Western "double standards."

Now, the controversial nuclear scientist is entering Pakistan's political arena. He recently announced the formation of the Movement for the Protection of Pakistan -- or Tehreek Tahaffuze Pakistan (TTP) in Urdu -- which he conceives as an organization that will back worthy candidates in the country's upcoming national assembly elections. He responded by email to questions posed to him by Simon Henderson about his political ambitions and his involvement in the spread of nuclear know-how across the globe.

Foreign Policy: Why are you launching this movement now?

A.Q. Khan: At the moment Pakistan is in an extremely precarious and dangerous condition - no law and order, widespread load shedding, a high crime rate, high unemployment, high inflation, target killing on religious, sectarian or provincial bases, extortions, kidnappings for ransom, etc. In short, it has gone to the dogs thanks to our most incompetent and corrupt rulers and their Western patrons. When there was mortal danger to Pakistan's existence and sovereignty after the first Indian nuclear explosion in May 1974, our successful nuclear and missile programme provided the country with an impregnable defense. At present we are in an even worse position than at that time. I can't simply sit back and see it destroyed. I feel that I must do something to try to save the situation, to make people aware of the importance and the sanctity of their votes and to use their vote judiciously and wisely in the next [national assembly] elections [due to take place in April 2013].

FP: What is the TTP's platform?

AQK: The aim of the Movement is to address the young generation (47% of the voters' bank), the educated, honest and competent government employees, businessmen (and women), lawyers, etc. in order to mobilize and prepare for the coming elections. They must be aware of the importance of selecting good, competent, qualified bureaucrats and technocrats to stand as independent candidates. A team put together by me will go from city to city to interview and investigate the antecedents of aspiring candidates and select them for the coming elections. We will then wholeheartedly support them. In the very short time of our existence, we already have more than two million volunteers.

FP: Do you have any particular prescriptions for Pakistan's economy and its energy shortages that can have an immediate impact?

AQK: As a competent and experienced engineer and scientist, I have ways and means in mind to solve these problems. Writing reports and forming committees serves little purpose. I am a go-getter and have always done my best to deliver what I promise to do. I am confident that we can solve many of these problems within a reasonable span of time.

My own knowledge and capabilities and the trust the people have in my abilities are the greatest assets. They know I am a competent, honest Pakistani and that I can solve problems and help them out of some of their miseries.

FP: How do you define success for your movement?

AQK: The people realize that things need to change and there is some change in their way of thinking already. If we manage to get a reasonable number of good people elected to Parliament, they can play a very important role. Currently the MQM [Muttahida Qaumi Movement, based in Sind province] with 25 seats (out of 342), the JUI [Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, an Islamist party] with 7 seats and the ANP [Awami National Party, supported by ethnic Pashtuns] with 17 seats are blackmailing and determining national policy. We could play a restraining and positive role, blocking all anti-state policies and activities. If we can achieve this, and I am very hopeful of being able to do so, then it will be a big success.

FP: Isn't one of the problems of Pakistan the dominant role of the military in politics and public affairs? How can this change? What is your prescription for the Pakistan military?

AQK: The army has been used by corrupt politicians, just as was happening in Turkey. If promotions were made purely on a seniority basis and personal likes and dislikes are not allowed to play a role, then they would never dare to indulge in politics. Right from the time of Ayub Khan [military dictator from 1958 to 1969] down to the present Chief [of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani], the principle of seniority has been ignored and the consequences have been disastrous.

FP: The acronym for your movement, TTP, is the same as that of the Pakistani Taliban. This is at best unfortunate or confusing. Was it intentional?

AQK: This is sheer coincidence and only came to my notice later. I have never been interested in the activities of the Taliban. The best word to convey our message was "Tahaffuz", which means "protection" or "safety". So the name became "Movement for the Protection of Pakistan", thus "Tehreek Tahaffuze Pakistan" (TTP).

FP: What are your own political ambitions? You are sometimes seen as a potential candidate as head of state (president) of Pakistan - would you take on this non-political role?

AQK: None. The love and affection the whole nation has shown me during all my trials and tribulations has given me what no money can buy. I want to help the country out of this rut and for it to become a respected, moderate, peaceful welfare state having friendly relations with all, especially its immediate neighbours, and enmity with none. I do not

want this country to play mercenary to foreign powers. As far as the non-political role is concerned, if the majority of the people think I can help them in that way, I would not shrink from what I would consider as a duty to Pakistan. However, I do not aspire to the position and it would only be possible through overwhelming support and desire.

We are quite clear about my role. I am just a guide -- some sort of Lee Kwan [sic] Yew, the former PM of Singapore, Mahathir [of Malaysia] or, hopefully, Mandela. I will only advise on good governance.

FP: What does your wife and the rest of your family think about your current activities? Even if you are only partly successful, you are likely to face criticism from existing political parties or perhaps even threats.

AQK: As far as criticism is concerned, I am not bothered by it (but my wife is) and have become used to it. I have never been a blue-eyed boy of the West like [present President Asif Ali] Zardari or [former military dictator and President Pervez] Musharraf, but that didn't bother me. I do care about what the ordinary people of Pakistan think of me.

FP: What restrictions are you currently under in terms of where you can go, who you can meet, and what you can say?

AQK: Security issues do exist. I can go anywhere, meet anybody (except foreigners), can address meetings, functions, convocations, bar associations, etc. and can give phone interviews to TV and radio stations provided only that these are within the country and are not about secret nuclear issues.

FP: You recently accused Musharraf of treason for handing over uranium enrichment centrifuges to the United States. Please say more: how many, what type, to whom, why? Also, was this somehow related to Iran or North Korea, or both?

AQK: Musharraf gave all our highly classified and secret information to the USA, the UK, Japan, the IAEA, etc. and sent invaluable centrifuge samples to the USA and the IAEA. He even gave them centrifuge drawings worth billions of dollars just to gain their patronage. For that he is a traitor.

FP: Following the recent terrorist attack on the Kamra air base and earlier attacks on the military headquarters in Rawalpindi and the naval air base in Karachi, are Pakistan's nuclear weapons safe? How can the world be confident in Pakistan's claims on this point?

AQK: Pakistan's nuclear assets are as safe as President Obama's black box. Nobody can even steal a screw from them. Gen. Khalid Kidwai, DG SPD [Director-General Strategic Plans Division (which controls Pakistan's nuclear arsenal)], and Gen. Muhammad Tahir, DG Security, are professional and competent officers and have established a very efficient security system. A real danger can arise only if there is a spineless military dictator or a stooge Army Chief who can order them or their successors to override the system. The world should worry about their own problems, not about ours.

FP: Your international reputation is that you were a rogue agent when Pakistan supplied centrifuge technology to Libya, Iran, and North Korea. How do you respond to this label? How would you prefer to be remembered?

AQK: I don't care what Western leaders think about me. To them a pirate like Francis Drake becomes Sir Francis; James Cook, who murdered innocent Polynesians, is a hero and those who murdered Iraqis, Afghans, Vietnamese, and Koreans now have chests full of ribbons and medals. [Former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem] Begin, [former President George W.] Bush, [former British Prime Minister Tony] Blair, [former French President Nicolas] Sarkozy, etc. who all caused (ordered) the murder of hundreds of thousands of innocent people are highly respected.

Whatever I did, I did in good faith and upon instructions from authorities. Since then, many senior army officers and politicians have openly said in TV programmes that I did not do anything wrong and that, by taking sole blame, I had saved the country a second time by thwarting Security Council resolutions against our nuclear programme. Nobody

in Pakistan doubts my integrity, honesty, sincerity or patriotism. It is this that I care about. I am not going to live or die in their countries, hence I don't care. Pakistani historians will remember me by the nickname they have given me: "Mohsin-e-Pakistan" (Saviour of Pakistan).

FP: Do you have any regrets about your role in the transfer of nuclear technology to these countries?

AQK: I did not do anything wrong, hence no regrets. I simply did as I was asked to do. Does France have any regrets about surreptitiously supplying nuclear weapons technology to Israel? Does Russia regret supplying that technology to China and North Korea? Do the British have regrets about stealing secrets from Los Alamos in the late forties or early fifties? There are many double standards in the world. What is good for me may be bad for you. What is just for you may be a crime for me.

FP: Any other points you want to make?

AQK: My only hope is that my efforts to make people aware of the importance and sanctity of their vote, and to elect capable leaders, makes a difference in the next elections. I have noticed that Western countries are nervous about my Movement, possibly suspecting that I might be a fundamentalist or a jihadi. They forget that I studied in Europe, lived there for 15 years, have a foreign wife, have two daughters who studied in the UK and have two granddaughters studying abroad, one in the UK and one in the USA.

How can I then be an enemy of any Western country? I seek mutually respectful, friendly relations with all, sanctity of our sovereignty, non-participation in mercenary activities or allowing our country to be used for terrorism, either from within or from outside. This is my dream.

Simon Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the Gulf and Energy Policy Program at The Washington Institute. His latest study is [Nuclear Iran: A Glossary of Terms \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/nuclear-iran-a-glossary-of-terms\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/nuclear-iran-a-glossary-of-terms), coauthored with former IAEA deputy director-general Olli Heinonen. ❖

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