

Pakistan joining the nuclear club

They told us Pakistan could never produce the bomb and they doubted my capabilities, but they know we have done it." Those, according to Indian journalist Kundip Nayyar, were the words of the director of Pakistan's nuclear program, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan.

Not true, retorted a very angry Dr. Khan when reports of the interview caused a worldwide media sensation. Since the interview had not been taped it was Khan's word against Nayyar's. Who was telling the truth? It's hard to say.

Nayyar, whose articles I often read, is one of India's best and most level-headed columnists. Khan must clearly have been aware that any open admission that Pakistan had the bomb could well result in a cut-off in the American aid upon which his nation so much depends. He may also have been referring to a jibe by a recent director of India's nuclear program that Pakistan would never be able to enrich uranium.

Whatever the case, the latest media uproar over the mysterious Pakistani bomb once again raises the question of just how close Islamabad is to achieving nuclear capability. Pakistan officially denies any nuclear weapon program and insists it is only developing civil nuclear power projects to replace imported oil upon which it relies for 80% of national energy needs.

But there is also a good amount of circumstantial evidence that Pakistan is working on nuclear weapons. Recent acquisition of triggering and fusing devices, along with exotic metals milling equipment, strongly suggests military application. Pakistan certainly does appear to have become a world leader in uranium enrichment technology through its indigenously developed ultra-

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centrifuge process. This method may be able to produce weapons-grade uranium enriched to 93.5%.

Confirmation that Pakistan has actually produced nuclear weapons could provoke the U.S. Congress to cut the \$400 million it gives in aid to Islamabad each year. Anti-Pakistan sentiment in Congress is growing, fueled by pressure from the powerful pro-Israel lobby.

Israel does not want to see Pakistan, a strong supporter of Arab causes, acquire any nuclear capability that could at all threaten its own Mideast nuclear monopoly. Ironically, while the U.S. Congress threatens Pakistan with an aid cut-off, it has long turned a blind eye to Israel's own nuclear program which has produced over 100 weapons. Widescale Israeli "diversion" of U.S. nuclear secrets and materials has been covered up.

Pakistan, like Israel, has good reasons for developing nuclear weapons. Both religious states are surrounded and outnumbered by hostile neighbors. While Israel can readily overpower its Arab foes, Pakistan today stands alone facing the combined might of India and the Soviet Union. Lacking any strategic depth, vulnerable on all sides and isolated from its western allies, Pakistan could well see nuclear weapons as a sort of last-

ditch insurance policy — just, in fact, as does Israel. Nor can Pakistan forget India's extensive nuclear program. It was India that introduced a "peaceful" weapon in Southwest Asia when it exploded a "peaceful" weapon in 1974.

Even though India loudly denies any military potential in its nuclear program, the U.S. Library of Congress estimates that India can produce fissionable plutonium-239 from a number of reactors that are not covered by international safeguards. By 1990, estimates are that India will be able to produce 60 nuclear weapons a year. Canada, we may recall, was duped into supplying much of the heavy water used in India's not-so-peaceful nuclear explosion. Today, India appears to be receiving secret supplies of heavy water that are being used to produce stockpiles of plutonium — or even finished weapons.

So if Pakistan has the bomb, or is a screw turn away, India most likely does too. After talking to a number of senior Pakistani defence officials, I came away with the strong impression that Pakistan, like Israel, likely did have components of nuclear weapons stored in underground vaults that could be quickly assembled into operational weapons.

Neither India nor Pakistan will admit to having the weapons, to avoid, among other reasons, having to wage an expensive and futile public arms race against its rival. These arms are for insurance, not grandstanding.

International pressure on Pakistan will not, I believe, deter it from assuring its own security, no more so than Israel has been prevented from becoming the world's sixth nuclear power. Nuclear weapons may make people nervous — but they make nations secure.

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