

The A. Q. Khan Network: Causes and Implications. Great Britain: Amazon, 2016.

Malik Qasim Mustafa*

In 1974, when India conducted its so called Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE), Pakistan's threat perception vis-à-vis India increased manifold. Pakistan's desire to counter India by developing its own nuclear weapons gained a new momentum when Dr. Khan returned from Europe. He not only laid down the foundation of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme but also accelerated his efforts to develop nuclear weapons. Finally, in May 1998, Dr. Khan quickly enabled Pakistan to match the Indian nuclear tests. However, after the 9/11 events, the international community's suspicion started to grow over Pakistan, specifically over Dr. Khan for running a nuclear black market and providing nuclear weapons know-how to the "Axis of Evil" courtiers, namely Iran, North Korea and other Middle Eastern states. When in February 2004, Dr. Khan made his confession that what he did was it at his own behest; Pakistani government pardoned him because of his contribution towards Pakistan's national security. Pakistan also vowed to stand firm against any future proliferation. However, this provided an opportunity to the international community and foes of Pakistan to point fingers over control and security of its nuclear weapons. Since then, Pakistan has made tremendous efforts and earned the repute of a responsible nuclear weapons state by safeguarding its nuclear assets, developing a robust command and control structure and strengthening of its exports control laws. Despite Pakistan's relentless efforts in the nuclear safety and security domain, propaganda against Pakistan nuclear programme is never ending.

Against this backdrop, the current study under review titled *The A. Q. Khan Network: Causes and Implications* is another attempt to examine a larger role of Dr. Khan in running the illicit nuclear market. The study mainly argues that Dr. Khan affair was a significant failure for all involved. Individual nuclear states and international community should

* *The book reviewer is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.*

revisit and examine their past mistakes to avoid a next A. Q. Khan affair. Based on Dr. Khan's affair, the thesis tries to derive implications for new nuclear states and dangers of nuclear proliferation. It attributed Dr. Khan as a free actor, conducting nuclear trade, but clarified that "there is no proof that the Pakistani state was aware of the nuclear transfer from Pakistan to Iran, North Korea, Libya, and perhaps others." It blamed Pakistani state and held it responsible for providing unprecedented freedom and autonomy to Dr. Khan. However, when study questions the ability of Pakistani state in past, it should equally question the ability of the international community and weakness of the international non-proliferation regime.

To support its theme, the thesis revolves around testing the arguments of two contending camps namely, 'deterrence optimists' and 'proliferation pessimists' through Dr. Khan's episode. Based on the theoretical framework of these two camps, it argued that the world is now in the midst of a new nuclear debate of safeguarding and securing the nuclear deterrence of new nuclear states. It has tested Dr. Khan's case against six different conditions which it believed could be replicated in new nuclear states. These conditions includes; the norm of norm defiance, as new nuclear states are opposed to the norms of international non-proliferation regime; adoption of uranium route instead of plutonium production involves massive illicit procurement network; covert weapons programme to avoid scrutiny; weak institutions and personalised rule increases the chances of weak judgment and a risk free future of the programme; and inability to learn from mistakes of other due to the element of secrecy.

The thesis tries to expose the dynamics of nuclear black market for proliferating nuclear weapons technology to more new states by individual actors rather than state itself. It has used Dr. Khan's case as a classic example and highlighted three case studies i.e. of Iran, North Korea and Libya to prove his main argument. The thesis highlights that how Dr. Khan acquired all the technical know-how and skills and how he accessed various actors and middle men initially to procure nuclear weapons technology for Pakistan. It has tried to establish that similar procurement network served as a nuclear proliferation black market. It was Dr. Khan's procurement efforts which earned him repute, freedom, and authority at home, which he later utilised for his personal gains.

Thus, thesis ruled out any states level involvement in proliferation related activities.

In three case studies of Iran, North Korea and Libya, the thesis has clearly established that Dr. Khan did it for personal gains. In Iranian case, Pakistan was either unable or unwilling to prevent transfers. It was because of loose safeguards of Pakistani state as Dr. Khan's cooperation with Iran continued even after those policy makers who might have approved such a venture had left the scene; and even continued after troubled relation of Pakistan and Iran. The thesis asserts that individual often take decisions that are not in the interest of their state.

On North Korean case study, the thesis highlights that very little information was available and as speculated some sort of nuclear barter might have been arranged between Pyongyang and Islamabad. However, there is no proved explanation was available. The thesis argued that there was an individual or institutional level rationale for Dr. Khan's assistance to Pyongyang. Similarly, the thesis argued that Dr. Khan's cooperation to Libya was more like an evidence of profit to Khan and his associates. The estimates of Libyan payments to Kahuta Research laboratories (KRL) ranged from \$50 to \$100 million, which was insufficient for Pakistan to take the risk. All these case studies have highlighted the level of cooperation between these states and Dr. Khan. These details include technology, significance of assistance and no the extent of state's involvement.

The thesis has also put forward some policy challenges like advancement of technology and availability of manufacturing capabilities in more and more states, globalisation and ease of travel and sharing of information. It has also looked at Pakistan with two ways of dealing; deal with as a bad state by raising the cost of its bad behaviour and the other way to deal with Pakistan was to reform it and to help it change its nature from inside. The thesis concludes that each new WMD programme could hold another potential A. Q. Khan, but efforts should be directed at not repetition of such episodes.

Although the thesis makes a reasonable contribution towards existing literature, yet it can attract more appeal by incorporating a similar detailed analysis of other actors of this nuclear black market. As the

study itself asserts that exposure of this network was a failure of international community and the international non-proliferation regime. Based on this assumption it can be argued that such network might still be operating in European states. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the international community to hunt down such networks for a safe and secure future. One the one hand, the thesis has glorified the penetration of Dr. Khan in to the network, while on the other hand it failed to highlight the greed of other European actors who were willing to provide illicit nuclear technology. Although the thesis admits that Dr. Khan is no more operating or not been able to do what he did in past, but what about other suppliers, middle men and font companies? Are they looking for new buyers or they have closed their shops after Dr. Khan? Such questions need detailed answers, especially at a time when nuclear renaissance has become a catch phrase. Since more and more states have shown interest in peaceful nuclear technology, but due to its dual use nature such illicit markets become active again or new ones will emerge with many Dr. A. Q. Khans.

The thesis can serve as a good background study for emerging non-proliferation experts. It could also be beneficial for non-proliferation organisations and even for policy makers at state level. It can help to identify flaws and weakness in the oversight system of existing and emerging new nuclear states. Its policy recommendations are equally valid and applicable for future as such illicit markets which are driven by personal gains and financial benefits would automatically find new actors and players.