

I've Sold Nuclear Secrets To Libya, Iran And N Korea

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By Ahmed Rashid in Lahore and Anton La Guardia

The father of Pakistan's atomic bomb has confessed to selling nuclear weapons secrets to some of the world's most notorious "rogue states", a senior official said yesterday.

The admission that Abdul Qadeer Khan freely sold nuclear technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea confirms one of America's worst fears - that a close ally in the "war on terrorism" has turned out to be the secret armourer of its worst foes.

In a briefing to Pakistani journalists, the official admitted that successive governments had failed to control the activities of Mr Khan. He claimed that the technology sales were made for "personal greed" and did not involve Pakistani governments - something many experts find difficult to believe.

There were unconfirmed reports last night that Mr Khan's daughter had fled abroad with information that could compromise Pakistan's top brass.

According to journalists invited to the briefing, Mr Khan told investigators in an 11-page confession that he had provided the secrets to other Muslim countries - Iran and Libya - so they could become nuclear powers and strengthen the Islamic world.

The transfer to North Korea was supposedly "to divert attention of the international community from Pakistan".

The 69-year-old Mr Khan has been kept under 24-hour house arrest since the investigation was prompted by Iran's admission to United Nations nuclear inspectors that Pakistan had provided designs and hardware for uranium enrichment gas centrifuges. These are used to make fuel for civilian power reactors, but can also be used to make fissile material for nuclear weapons.

The government of Gen Pervaiz Musharraf has been gradually preparing public opinion for the news that one of its public heroes has betrayed Pakistan's most important military secrets.

In recent days, newspapers have reported that Mr Khan had a vast range of properties in Pakistan and abroad, and even used military transport aircraft to ship furniture to a hotel he owned in Timbuktu, Mali.

The disclosure is an acute embarrassment for Gen Musharraf. Islamic radicals accuse him of bowing to America's diktat. But the Pakistani leader is under Western pressure to tighten his grip of Pakistan's nuclear technology or risk being treated as a rogue state.

Senior Western officials have given Gen Musharraf private assurances that if he takes stern action they will take at face value his claims that nuclear technology was sold by scientists for "greed" and not at the behest that Pakistani governments.

In his confession Mr Khan absolved the army of any wrong-doing. "He does not mention the armed forces," said the official. "There were intelligence lapses on our part and we admit to them."

That is unlikely to convince international inspectors or the Pakistani public, who have long believed that the army



Khan: strengthening the Islamic world

rather than the government of the day has always controlled Pakistan's nuclear programme.

Officials said two former army chiefs have been questioned, but were not implicated in the scandal.

"Investigators have been able to establish that all this was driven by personal greed and ambition," the official said.

"He [Khan] talked unconvincingly about dispersal among Islamic states, but that does not seem very convincing as North Korea is also included."

Three nuclear scientists, two brigadiers and a major general are also among those accused of being involved. The army has so far declined to say whether anybody will be put on trial.

Officials said Mr Khan first began to transfer designs, drawings and components for gas centrifuges to Iran between 1989 to 1991. He provided similar technology to North Korea and Libya between 1991 and 1997.

They say these transfers ended in 2000. However America has said nuclear technology transfers from Pakistan to North Korea took place as late as 2002 and to Libya in August last year.