**Yaum-e-Qadeer**

Humayun Gauhar

Friday, Oct 15, 2021

Every country needs its heroes, and Pakistan is no exception. If they don’t have one, they manufacture one. But that’s part of human nature.

One of Pakistan’s heroes was the nuclear scientist, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, who helped manufacture the nuclear bomb for Pakistan. It is for this reason that he is held in very high regard by the people and also by the government, which bestowed on him Pakistan’s top civilian awards. When the news of his death at the age of 85 broke early in the morning of October 10, there was an outpouring of grief.

Pakistan would not have entered the nuclear arms race but for India testing its nuclear option in early 1974. That was the catalyst that spurred Pakistan to make a nuclear option for itself. It was necessary for Pakistan’s protection and survival, and it didn’t take them very long to get there. Though our bomb was tested on May 28, 1998, it was ready much earlier. We were waiting for an opportune moment, which India kindly provided.

A Q Khan’s achievement became all the greater considering he did it in the face of grave danger, with every anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan joker out to assassinate him. The Americans of course topped the list and kept making demands for him to be handed over to them or to be allowed to interrogate him. Luckily Pakistan was able to stand up to them as too to the Israelis who were also trying their hardest to finish off A Q Khan one way or the other. But, fortunately, India’s stupidity sometimes gets the better of it.

A well-known Indian journalist, Kuldeep Nayyar came to Islamabad in the 1980s and managed to interview A Q Khan with the help of another well-known Pakistani journalist. The interview was published by ‘The Muslim’ and in London’s Observer newspaper. All hell broke loose but was soon brought under control and so this game of the jackal and the doctor continued until Pakistan did its nuclear test in late May 1998.

When Pakistan tested its bomb there was great joy all over the country. People placed Dr Qadeer on a very high pedestal. Thereafter he could do no wrong, which is as it should be. This is why I have always thought that May 28 should be celebrated as the Day of Qadeer or Yaum-e-Qadeer.

Dr Qadeer hailed from the Indian princely state of Bhopal famous for the women who ran it with an iron fist. The women of Bhopal are certainly tough, participating in hunts and the like.

At Partition, Dr A Q Khan’s parents decided to move to Pakistan and the die was cast. He graduated in science subjects from European universities where he learned about nuclear power. He got a job in a well-known firm specialising in making nuclear power plants and the like. When India first tested its nuclear bomb in 1974, Dr Qadeer was shocked and, like a good scientist and patriot, he started thinking about how Pakistan could acquire nuclear capability.

It occurred to him that he need look no further than himself. Thus, he wrote a letter to the then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, offering his services to make a nuclear bomb. Bhutto took up his offer with alacrity and it was not long before Dr A Q Khan found himself in Islamabad forming a whole organisation to achieve nuclear capability.

In that sense, Bhutto was one of the fathers of the nuclear bomb. After Bhutto, General Zia and his finance minister Ghulam Ishaq Khan were committed to help Dr A Q Khan to succeed despite the nuclear sanctions the US had slapped on Pakistan after Pakistan had helped them win the Afghan jihad and defeat the Soviet Union. Whilst America’s attention was diverted to the Afghan war, Zia and Ishaq Khan quietly went about developing the nuclear bomb with Dr A Q Khan in charge. And they did. Meanwhile, Israel had also made and tested nuclear weapons, which made ours what would be – and still – is the Muslim world’s only nuclear weapon.

Thus Dr A Q Khan is not only a hero in Pakistan but in many Muslim countries too. He sacrificed a great deal doing what he did because there were few countries he could visit for fear of assassination and kidnapping. Sure, he made mistakes along the way, but that is human. Show me a human who never made a mistake, and I will show you a god. But with his great achievement of making a bomb, all his mistakes were washed away. So let us not dwell on those too much. Let history be the judge.

The writer is a veteran journalist, political analyst and author.

Email: humayun.gauhar786@gmail.com