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Subject: Pakistani Army Linked, in Letter, to Nuclear Sale (NYT)

WASHINGTON — The emergence of a single-page letter supposedly written by a senior North Korean official 13 years ago has become the strongest evidence yet suggesting that Pakistan's top military officials were involved in a secret sale of equipment to North Korea that enabled it, years later, to begin enriching uranium.

The letter is said to have been written to Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani who built the world's largest black market in nuclear weapons technology, by Jon Byong Ho, a North Korean whom American intelligence has long put at the center of the North's trade in missile and nuclear technologies. It reports that the chief of the Pakistani Army at the time, Gen. Jehangir Karamat, had been paid \$3 million and asked that "the agreed documents, components, etc." be placed on a North Korean plane that was returning to Pyongyang, the North's capital, after delivering missile parts to Pakistan.

The publication of the letter comes at a particularly inopportune moment for the Pakistani military. Already discredited inside Pakistan for its failure to detect the American commando raid that killed Osama bin Laden in May, the military has veered from crisis to crisis since then. If authentic, the letter seems certain to rekindle questions about whether Pakistan's most respected institution played a key role in the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology.

The letter was provided by Dr. Khan in 2007 to Simon Henderson, a scholar who has written extensively about the Pakistani scientist, who passed it on some time ago, unauthenticated, to The Washington Post, which published it on Thursday. The Post said it also could not verify that the letter, which is written in English, came from Mr. Jon, whose name has also been rendered as Jeon Byung-ho. But its details appear consistent with events at that time, and American officials said Thursday that it might well be genuine.

Pakistan, which declared long ago that its investigations into Dr. Khan's sales to North Korea, Libya, Iran and other nations were closed, dismissed the letter as a fabrication, and General Karamat has said that the tale of the \$3 million payment is untrue, The Post reported.

The letter contradicts Pakistan's official account that Dr. Khan was operating without the knowledge of Pakistani officials, including military officers, when he sold the country's nuclear technology abroad. American intelligence officials have never accepted that story, saying that it was inconceivable that Dr. Khan could have had regular access to Pakistani military planes for his deliveries, or that he would have been able to conduct high-stakes diplomacy with other nations, without the knowledge of the country's military leaders.

While it is well known that Dr. Khan sold Pakistani centrifuge equipment to North Korea — former President Pervez Musharraf wrote about it in his memoir — until last year it was unclear what the North did with that technology. That mystery ended last year, when North Korea showed a visiting American nuclear expert, Siegfried S. Hecker of Stanford University, a working centrifuge facility. Dr. Hecker described the type of centrifuge as one that seemed very close to the Pakistani design.

Dr. Khan was placed under house arrest in 2003, after it came to light that he was selling the technology he used to help design Pakistan's nuclear weapons. He has since claimed that he had evidence that many in the Pakistani establishment knew about his dealings, and provided the letter to back up his claims.

“He gave me this several years ago, and though he didn't explain his motivation, I suspect he saw it as an insurance policy,” said Mr. Henderson, who is at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “He saw it as a crucial document that could completely reverse the accepted narrative that he was a rogue agent.”

There are reasons to be skeptical about the letter's origins. It is written in better English than most North Korean documents. It bears no letterhead, though that has been the case with other missives from the North. The date is written in Western form, not the peculiar dating system common in North Korea.

The only way to confirm its authenticity would be through Mr. Jon, who South Korean officials believe has since been pushed out of the hierarchy. “We don't have enough from Jon to know whether this sounds like him,” said one American official. “But the facts seem right.”

The letter is dated July 15, 1998, just a month and a half after Pakistan's first nuclear test, which was conducted in response to a test by India. Mr. Jon offers his “heartiest felicitations” on the success of that test, which led to American sanctions against both countries. North Korea conducted its own first nuclear test eight years later.

Another element of the letter refers to the killing, just weeks before, of the wife of a North Korean general, Kang Tae Yun, who was based in Pyongyang. “I am certain that Gen. Kang was the target and I have no doubt that the C.I.A., South Korean intelligence agents and your ISI were involved,” the letter states, the last a reference to the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's powerful spy agency.

It also reports that General Kang will be replaced by a “Mr. Yon,” who had “served in Iran, Egypt, Syria and Libya and is very competent.” With the exception of Egypt, all of those countries ultimately bought nuclear equipment and designs from North Korea.

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