

US Sanctions A.Q. Khan Network

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Washington— An influential US lawmaker has demanded action to prevent a new nuclear blackmarket as Washington announced sanctions on notorious Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan and 12 others involved in his busted proliferation network.

"These sanctions, though belated, are welcome," said Howard Berman, Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, noting: "Those involved in the A.Q. Khan nuclear black market are party to the worst proliferation of nuclear equipment and technology in history."

"But the sanctions do not put an end to the matter; equipment and technology from this network may still be circulating, and new suppliers could well spring up to take Khan's place," he said Monday.

President-elect Barack Obama would inherit a complex situation, in which he must redouble US efforts against international black markets in weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, Berman said.

"Congress should be ready to provide new funds and the legal authorities that he may need to end the activities of these merchants of mass destruction," he added.

Earlier, the State Department announced that sanctions will be imposed on 13 individuals and three private companies for their involvement in the A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network.

This announcement comes after a multi-year US government review of the available information pertaining to the activities of this network.

"We believe these sanctions will help prevent future proliferation-related activities by these private entities, provide a warning to other would-be proliferators, and demonstrate our ongoing commitment to using all available tools to address proliferation-related activities," it said.

"Dr. A.Q. Khan led an extensive international network for the proliferation of nuclear equipment and know-how that provided 'one stop shopping' for countries seeking to develop nuclear weapons. He and his associates provided Iran and Libya with centrifuge components, designs and, in some cases, complete centrifuges.

"The United States also believes that Khan and his associates provided centrifuge designs, equipment and technology to North Korea. Dr. Khan also provided Libya with nuclear weapons designs," the State Department said.

With the assistance of Khan's network, countries could leapfrog the slow, incremental stages of other nuclear weapons development programmes.

In 2004, following Libya's welcome decision to renounce its nuclear programme, the United States removed from Libya items it had received from the network.

The network's actions have irrevocably changed the proliferation landscape and have had lasting implications for international security, the State Department said.

Governments around the world, including Pakistan, South Africa, Turkey, Britain, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Switzerland and Malaysia, worked closely with the United States to investigate and shut down the network, it said.

Governments have also joined together to put in place United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 to criminalise proliferation and have worked cooperatively to establish the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to enhance international tools to interdict and prevent trade in sensitive technologies, it said.

Many of Khan's associates are either in custody, being prosecuted, or have been convicted of crimes. Khan publicly acknowledged his involvement in the network in 2004, although he later retracted those statements.

"While we believe the A.Q. Khan network is no longer operating, countries should remain vigilant to ensure that Khan network associates, or others seeking to pursue similar proliferation activities, will not become a future source for sensitive nuclear information or equipment,"it said.

Besides A. Q. Khan, sanctions have been imposed on: Selim Alguadis, Kursad Zafer Cire, Muhammad Nasim ud Din, EKA Elektronik Kontrol Aletleri Sanayi ve Ticaret A.S., ETI Elektroteknik Sanayi ve Ticaret A.S., Muhammad Farooq, Paul Griffin, Peter Griffin, Shamsul Bahrin bin Rukiban, Buhary Seyed Abu Tahir, and Shah Hakim Shahnazim Zain.