June 16, 1980
Transcript of BBC Panorama Television Program, 'Project 706: the Islamic Bomb'

Citation:

"Transcript of BBC Panorama Television Program, 'Project 706: the Islamic Bomb'", June 16, 1980, Wilson Center Digital Archive, The National Archive of the UK, FCO 37/2370. Contributed by Malcolm Craig. https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/270587

Summary:

From early 1979 onwards, media coverage of the "Islamic bomb" became ever more prominent. In Mid-June 1980, the BBC's prestigious Panorama investigative strand aired "Project 706: The Islamic Bomb," that seemingly underscored alleged Pakistani-Libyan connections, uranium supplied by Niger, the complicity of British, German, Italian, and Swiss industry, and the threat of pan-Islamic nuclear proliferation. Reporter Philip Tibenham opened by alarmingly informing viewers that: "This convoy grinding across the empty Sahara is carrying what could be the raw material for the world's first nuclear war …. It's been mined in the Islamic state of Niger. It'll be flown on to Islamic Libya; then on to Islamic Pakistan. Tonight, Panorama reports exclusively on payments of millions of pounds by Libya's Colonel Gaddafi to finance Pakistan's efforts to build the 'Islamic bomb'."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

NOTE: THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A TELEDIPHONE RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY, IN SOME CASES, OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS ACCURACY.

P A N O R A M A

Recorded from transmission on BBC-1 at 2010 — 16th June, 1980

PHILIP TIBENHAM: This convoy grinding across the empty Sahara is carrying what could be the raw material for the world's first nuclear war. The trucks are heading for a dusty desert air strip with a cargo of uranium yellow cake. It's been mined in the Islamic state of Niger. It'll be flown on to Islamic Libya; then on to Islamic Pakistan. Tonight, Panarama reports exclusively on payments of millions of pounds by Libya's Colonel Gaddafi to finance Pakistan's efforts to build the 'Islamic Bomb'.

(MUSIC)

PHILIP TIBENHAM: Here at Kahoota, just outside Islamabad, under conditions of rigid security, Pakistan's attempting to transform yellow cake into palm grey uranium. Known within military as project seven-o-six it's defended by anti-aircraft missiles. Curious Europeans who've strayed too close have been brutally beaten by security police. Yet Pakistan is on the verge of building the bomb because she's been able to buy almost total access to Western technology. Project sever-o-six owes its existence to sophisticated companies scattered across Europe who've been happy to accept Pakistani money without asking too many questions. The buying of Western technology's been carried out by a network of resourceful Pakistani agents in Europe with the help of their European middlemen. Sometimes using deception, sometimes dangling hard cash, they've been able to get from private enterprise in the West most of the components they'll need to build a bomb. Project sever-o-six is closely modelled on a uranium enrichment plant at Almalo in Holland. Pakistan managed to penetrate the tight security here and obtain a list of over a hundred sub-contractors — the basis of their buying campaign. There are some grim conclusions to be drawn from the story of project seven-o-six. It's brought the prospect of a nuclear exchange between unstable regimes considerably closer. Secondly, it's proved that any ruthless and determined government with the money and will can get the bomb by stealth. And thirdly, the West seriously over-estimated its own ability to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Against all the evidence, Pakistan continue to deny it's building the bomb.

FB

GENERAL ZIA UL-HAQ: I have said it on top of my voice we're not in competition with any other country of the region in the nuclear technology. We are not making a bomb. We are sold to the idea of nuclear or stopping nuclear proliferation in the world. But where the dissension has arisen is I say that it is the right of any developing country to acquire the modern technology. And amongst the modern technology is the nuclear technology. Nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

PHILIP TIBENHAM: That's not what's happening here at Pinstake (phon.), the Pakistan institute of technology, where scientists are determined to produce plutonium as the vital core of a nuclear weapon. We believe they'll be able to carry out their first test eighteen months from now. When it happens, it'll be largely thanks to the organisation of this man. Mr S.A. Butt has been the ingenious quarter-master for the Pakistani bomb project. Based in Paris, he spent colossal sums of money on components for the bomb. Reportedly Butt himself was in at the birth of the bomb at a meeting held by the late Ali Bhutto. Present were Professor Abdul Salam, later to win a Nobel Prize, Ishwat Usmani, Head of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission and Munir Khan, who was to succeed him. The date:1972.

KHALID HASAN: It was rather, you know, like a jamboree, you know, it was very...there was a great deal of enthusiasm and joy and these were, you know, the early days you know, Bhutto had said that anything, he could have got away with anything. His authority was unquestioned. And loyalty to Bhutto was unquestioned. He was looked upon as the great Messiah. So he got all these boys together and they were senior people, very senior people, and junior people and youngsters, and he said "look, we're going to have a bomb, like we're going to have a party." He said:"Can you give it to me?" So, you know, they started shouting like schoolchildren. They said:"Oh yes, yes, yes, you can have it, you can have it". Bhutto was very amused and he said, well, much as I appreciate your enthusiasm, but these are serious matters. But in any case this is a very serious political decision which Pakistan must make; and perhaps all third world countries must make one day because it is coming. So, can you do it. They said we can do it given the resources and the facilities. So Bhutto said "I shall find you the resources and I shall find you the facilities."

TIBENHAM: Exactly three weeks later, Pakistani papers reported on Ali Bhutto's triumphant tour of the Middle East and North Africa — Sudan, Ethiopia and Libya. He had to find the money he'd promised his scientists.

FB

KHALID HASAN: You know, I was on the trip and we visited about sixteen countries. Somalia, and Libya and Ethiopia. He didn't get it from Haile Selassie, I can assure you.

TIBENHAM: One of the most ecstatic welcomes of the tour was from Colonel Gaddafi of Libya. Outwardly he was very different from Bhutto, but the two men respected each other as brothers in Islam.

HASAN: Bhutto said — one of the last things he said, you know, before his execution — that "I want to be remembered as a revolutionary and as a poet. And I think Gaddafi is a revolutionary too.

TIBENHAM: But it wasn't only brotherly love that attracted Gaddafi to Bhutto. The Colonel had publicly and unashamedly declared his yearning for a nuclear weapon. With the enormous wealth from his oilfields he'd already tried to import nuclear expertise. People who would build him what he called the "sword of Islam". He told a Lebanese newspaper "People now say that this country has fifty planes and that country has five-hundred the day will come when they will say this country has three nuclear bombs and that country has ten — Libya will not be absent when that day comes.

TIBENHAM: Earlier, he'd made somewhat naive approaches to France and China to buy an off-the-shelf bomb and had been rejected. Later, he even tried to bribe India with massive supplies of cheap oil in exchange for a bomb and again he was turned down. Suddenly, here was Pakistan — a potential bomb supplier -- with its palm outstretched waiting for Gaddafi to put money into it. Secret meetings began in Paris between Pakistani and Libyan representatives. So secret that only a handful of men knew about them. Among them Ali Bhutto himself and Munir Khan, Head of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission. The first meeting was in 1973. We've been given an account of those meetings by a Pakistani diplomat who was involved. Like other Pakistani informants in this film, he's been warned of a long prison sentence if he talks. His account of what happened is read.

VOICE OVER: There were various meetings in 1973 involving Libyan and Pakistani representatives. Most Pakistani diplomats in Paris were not told. Less than ten people knew of the meetings. The Libyans wanted the entire capability. Sums in excess of five-hundred-million dollars were discussed. There were also discussions with other countries, including Saudi Arabia and Gulf States. The r interests were different from Gaddafi's. They principally wanted Pakistan to possess the expertise. They weren't making the same demands as Gadaffi. During the negotiations the Pakistani side believed that a total investment — if you like to call it that — of several billion dollars was possible. But nothing like that amount ever arrived.

FB

TIBENHAM: But massive sums of money did arrive in Pakistan. Another senior Pakistani, now in fear of a ten-year prison term, has told us exclusively that staggering consignments of money — sometimes as much as a-hundred-million dollars in cash — was specially flown from Libya to Pakistan. The flights began in 1975.

... A plane left Tripoli for Pakistan in December and another in the summer of 1976 carrying money from Colonel Gaddafi for Mr Bhutto for use in the manufacture of an atom bomb. And money was always carried in suitcases by trusted couriers in high denomination notes. Mr Bhutto told me that Colonel Gaddafi had several discussions with him on the subject at Lahore during the Islamic Summit and had promised all the financial help necessary to manufacture such a bomb, but also indicated that he would like to have the first one.

TIBENHAM: But what happened on this particular occasion, how was the money got to the plane.

... In suitcases, carried by a courier each time on a Boeing flight from Tripoli via Rome to Karachi under a very special security arrangements.

TIBENHAM: So one man carrying a-hundred-million in cash.

... Yes, at least a-hundred-million. There was a special arrangement at Rome airport for security and the impression given was that it was a VIP flight.

TIBENHAM: And there's no question that this was cash for the bomb.

... Oh there's no doubt about that.

TIBENHAM: So people with the money, the technology and training had always been available. In the early seventies when the Pakistan bomb project was born, the United States and Canada still firmly believed that it was their duty to bestow nuclear knowledge on the struggling Third World.

VOICE OVER: Who says scientists are serious. Certainly not Professor Kneelie (phon) who played the piano while a student sang.

. FB

TIBENHAM: In this relaxed international atmosphere Pakistan ordered Candu (phon.) reactor from Canada. partly because she genuinely needed nuclear power. But there was another reason: it was the first step towards the bomb. The easiest route to the bomb is to produce plutonium. To do that on a large scale you need a nuclear reactor like this. It'll turn you out lots of spent atomic fuel containing plutonium. To recover that plutonium you must have a reprocessing plant. That was to be Pakistan's next step.

... The reactor was our source for plutonium. Already we had begun negotiating to buy reprocessing equipment to extract plutonium from the spent fuel. And we had the design for a plant since 1958. The experimental work was to be done at Pinstack (phon.) — the Pakistan Institute for Nuclear Science and Technology. Bhutto said a real team would be built up and one was assembled; money was never a problem.

INDIAN PROPAGANDA FILM: On the hundred-and-thirty-eighth day of the year at zero-two hours, thirty minutes, twenty seconds, Greenwich mean time, corresponding to eight hours, zero-eight minutes, twenty seconds in the morning Indian Standard Time, the graph went haywire. Three minutes earlier in the desert through the haze of dust and debris you can see the hillock rising.

TIBENHAM: In the spring of 1974 Pakistan's old enemy India pulled off a remarkable propaganda coup by detonating what was called "a peaceful plutonium device" she shook the West and Pakistan. India had acquired plutonium and beaten them to the punch. The shaken Pakistanis focused their attention on one of the most powerful industrialists in France. The head of SGN — the biggest exporter of reprocessing plants in the world — is Francois-Xavier Poincet. His company is sixty-six per cent controlled by the French government. He'd already been in negotiation with the Pakistanis over the supply of a nuclear reprocessing plant which recovers plutonium from spent fuel. Poincet fully accepted the Pakistani's pleadings that they needed the plant purely for a grandiose civil power programme. It's hard to accept, though, that the French government were totally unaware of Pakistan's long-term intentions. On July the twenty-eighth, 1975 the French embassy in Brussels wrote in confidence to the French Foreign Office that the President of the Pakistani Atomic Energy Commission had declared that whether the French deal went through or not, Pakistan planned to get a plant able to manufacture the small amount of plutonium necessary for an explosive device, using natural irradiated uranium produced by their Canadian reactor.

FB

TIBENHAM: So, are you telling me that throughout this whole period it never crossed your mind that this plant could be put to anything other than peaceful purposes?

FRANCOIS POINCET: Obviously,I can't say that. I mean if you make...suppose you make a steel plant could you be certain that none of the steel would ever be used to make a gun. There's no relation. This plant was intending to reproces irradiated fuel. Pakistan has a source of irradiated fuels.Since they have one reactor they are planning to have others. They have to reprocess this fuel. They make a reprocessing plant, that's quite normal. When you come and say, ah,may be they will make an atomic bomb. May be with a steel plant they will make a weapon, they may make a gun, make pistol, who can say.

TIBENHAM: This is the sort of reprocessing plant M.Poincet builds. What the Pakistanis wanted was a scaled-down version of the same thing. If their plans for an expending civil programme had been genuine they would, indeed, have needed a plant like this. But they haven't placed a single order in that programme. So they had no need for such a large plant. Some Americans, unlike the French, were beginning to realise what a difference the plant could make.

JOSEPH NYE: That's the difference between having a quite large arsenal of weapons usable material quite quickly as opposed to having to eke it out in small quantities at a time.

TIBENHAM: When you say a large arsenal, what do you have in mind?

NYE: Well, I would imagine the materials that could have been diverted from the plant or would be available if safeguards were broken would be somewhere fifteen or twenty bombs worth right away as opposed to a much smaller amounts that would have to be done through clandestine plants or by other means.

TIBENHAM: And an ability to add to those fifteen quite regularly.

NYE: Yes, quite regularly.

TIBENHAM: Bhutto was in Canada when the French made up their minds to go ahead and supply the plant. Everything now rested on a rubber stamp from the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. The agency was to inspect the plant and monitor the amounts of nuclear material produced. Bhutto was actually inside the Canadian parliament building when a cable arrived granting international approval.

FB

KHALID HASAN: And you know his face lit up and he relaxed. He was very very pleased. And, you know, later in the afternoon there was a press conference and he said "look why are you asking me questions about the reprocessing plant. The IAEA has cleared it. So what are your misgivings"

TIBENHAM: From its headquarters in Vienna, the IAEA is supposed to act as the world's nuclear guardian and ombudsman. From the millions of words that pour in here every day an army of civil servants is in theory able to spot nuclear misbehaviour and put a stop to it. Complicated safeguards were, indeed, built into the Pakistani agreement. But what use are safeguards if a nation intends on building a bomb?

SIGVARD EKLUND: I can't recall at the time when this matter was approved by the board that they had declared their intention to go ahead with a nuclear weapon programme. That I don't recall.

TIBENHAM: Pakistan undertook that no reprocessing plant nor any material produced shall be used for the manufacture of any nuclear weapon or to further any other military purpose or for the manufacture of any other nuclear explosive device. But let's be frank everybody knew what the plant was for, didn't they?

KHALID HASAN: Well, I suppose, I can all the Western countries knew.

TIBENHAM: Bhutto went home in glory. The plant which the French were to build had two alluring attractions. One, the means to fuel a new generation of reactors to ease Pakistan's power starvation if he wanted. But two, once in operation it would guarantee a tremendous lead in any arms race with India. But the Americans had already decided to stop Bhutto in his triumphant tracks. Dr HenrynKissinger was given the job. Bhutto claimed that Kissinger told him "if you go ahead with this plan, we will make a horrible example of you". Bhutto took this to mean that his downfall would be engineered by America. Pressure from the Carter administration finally persuaded the French to suspend the reprocessing deal. In Washington there was self-congratulation on a tactical victory — an end to the Pakistani bomb. But they were wrong. The first-ever nuclear bomb was made from uranium, not plutonium. What the Americans didn't know was that the Pakistanis far from being halted in their plans had quietly embarked on a second route to the bomb — to build a weapon exactly like the one dropped on Hiroshima. A bomb made with enriched uranium. And in this they were to be proved almost unstopable.

FB

TIBENHAM: In the summer of 1972 a pleasant young Pakistani scientist and his British-born wife moved into this quiet suburb, not far from Amsterdam airport. Abdul Khadir Khan and his wife Henny quickly settled into the neat community of young married couples. The lace on the door and the tended potted plants in the window of Number Seventy-One, Amsdel made them seem models of suburban respectability. Khan didn't talk much about Pakistan and everyone understood he intended to live in Holland for good. He occasionally mentioned that he'd been educated at a couple of Europe's better universities. Apart from that people remember only that the Khans were so downright nice.

DR GEORGE VANDER PERRE: For instance he was offering cookies and sweeties to the secretaries because in his idea a girl should be a little bit fatty let's say. That was one of his .....

TIBENHAM: Or that attractive women needed to be fat.

PERRE: Yes, yes something like that.

TIBENHAM: In fact Khan was a perfect family man, faithful to his wife and devoted to his daughters. His life was going to work and looking after the family. But occasionally he took trips to his old universities and it was after one of these that he came home with good news — he'd landed an intriguing new job. It was worth, it was to fling him into a world he'd never known before. The world of the industrial spy. Khan's new employers just happened to be the major sub-contractors to Urenco — the Dutch-British-German consortium which runs a massive uranium enrichment plant at Almalo in Holland. Here, uranium gas is rotated at incredible speeds to produce enriched uranium. This is the sort of equipment the Pakistanis would need for the second route to the bomb; a bomb using highly enriched uranium. While he was working in Holland, Khan was approached by Pakistani agents who realised his knowledge of specialised metals could be invaluable in this alternative bomb programme. Khan was a willing recruit and he could tell them exactly what they needed to buy. To his neighbours Khan seemed his normal likeable self. They did notice that now and then large cars with 'CD' plates would arrive from France and Belgium and often not leave until the early hours. But they took little or no notice of it. Suddenly, on December the fifteenth, 1975 Khan, his wife and two little girls disappeared. He'd been recalled to Islamabad — his mission in Europe had been accomplished. Back home, Khan was whisked into rather more splendid accommodation — a government villa on the outskirts of Islamabad; with the ultimate luxury — a private swimming pool. He was even given his own guards. When one European tried to approach the house he was given a severe beating.

FB

DR GEORGE VAN DER PERRE: It was unbelievable. It didn't fit into the image we have of Khan here.

TIBENHAM: Khan's new job was to take charge of the Pakistan enrichment programme. The centrifuge system is being constructed under the strictest security just outside Islamabad. The components being used here at Kahuto were all bought in Europe; results of deals in which Khan was involved before he left. The purchases arranged by a network of Pakistanis in Brussels, and Paris had all skillfully sidestepped the West's nuclear export regulations. The Pakistanis are so concerned about Kahuto that they've installed French Krotile anti-aircraft missiles to protect the installations. The Indian border is only five minutes flying time away and the Pakistanis have no intention of being surprised by a sudden strike by India's well-trained air force. Western intelligence sources sketch the interior of Kahuto like this: at the heart is the centrifuge system itself, surrounded by laboratories and ancillary buildings that house the control equipment, gas feed system and power supply; a guard block, power generating station and a battery of anti-aircraft guns to protect the site; inside the cascade hall several thousand centrifuges which once working could produce enough enriched uranium for six weapons a year. The enrichment process is so complex and costly that it created the perfect cover for the Pakistanis intentions. Almost no scientist or government official in the West believed that they would undertake such a challenging method. In fact almost every piece of equipment inside Kahuto has come from Europe, including Britain. One of the first purchases — the Pakistani centrifuge — was a batch of inverters from the Swindon plant of Emerson Electric. Inverters ensure that the current arriving at the centifuge remains absolutely constant; that's essential when the motors have to run at tens of thousands of revolutions a minute. The management of Emersons, both here in Swindon and of their parent company in the United States, refuse point-blank to talk about the inverters. But a scientist who used to work here has told us that anybody who is anybody in the company had a pretty shrewd idea of what they were for. But they weren't bothered. They were convinced the Pakistanis wouldn't know what to do with them. Indeed, he says, there was a company joke that the inverters would rust away in their cases up in the hills and then the Pakistanis would order some more. In fact, only a couple of weeks or so after the inverters arrived in Pakistan a telex came here asking for a whole list of very sophisticated modifications and that took the wind out of the management's sails. It was another example of Western arrogance assuming the Pakistanis had no idea what they were up to. The Pakistanis in fact knew exactly where to go to place their order for inverters without causing too much suspicion — to the prosperous little town of Leonberg, not far from Stuttgart. One of their go-between companies is Team Industries. The Pakistanis wanted thirty-one inverters and they were prepared to pay above the going rate for them. Their middleman was one of the company directors, a Mr Pfel (phon.). Mr Pfel hoped there'd be more orders like this. On this one alone his commission ran into thousands of pounds.
FB

TIBENHAM: I'm asking you matters of purely public interest about your dealings with Emersons and the Pakistanis. Is it true you placed an order in 1976.

PFEL: I am on Friday in England with Mrs Thatcher together.

TIBENHAM: A later order for more centrifuges from Emersons worth over a million pounds was frozen by the British Government. Even so, Pakistan already had enough converters to run several thousand centrifuges. In 1976 three Pakistani buyers came here to Switzerland. This time they were frank about what they wanted: valves for uranium enrichment plant. VAT, a highly specialised firm which supplies nuclear facilities all over the world, were only too happy to oblige. To cover themselves, they wrote to the appropriate government official asking whether an export licence was required. The government wrote back listing sensitive items based on guidelines laid down by the so-called London Club of Nuclear Supplier Nations. The Pakistani order didn't clash with the list and the Swiss government, anxious for firms to enter the lucrative nuclear export market, didn't ask further questions. The Pakistanis were so impressed with this aggressive selling attitude that they upped their requirements. They went to Kora Engineering, tucked away in the Alps with an astounding request: could Kora, they asked, design and build a system to feed gas to the centrifuges. The answer was a very rapid 'yes'. This is no small vague component, but a vital stage in the enrichment process to be custom-made in Europe. It was one of the biggest and most blatant orders placed anywhere by the Pakistanis. So how did Kora imagine the enriched uranium they were helping to produce would be used?

RUDOLF WALTI: What can lead to a nuclear weapon, that is the question, of course. Nuts and bolts can lead to a nuclear weapon. Where do you draw the line?

TIBENHAM: The complete plant was so large that three chartered Hercules planes were needed to fly it from Switzerland to Pakistan.

TIBENHAM: Let's suppose you were absolutely satisfied that they were going to use this plant to make a nuclear weapon. Would that have changed your mind one bit about supplying it?

RUDOLF WALTI: First of all we have no knowledge in nuclear weapons design or construction or anything; we wouldn't even know how to build one, how to design one. That is one thing and we would certainly not actively support anyone to build a nuclear weapon. Right?

FB

PHILIP TIBENHAM: But you have, haven't you?

RUDOLF WALTI: No. How could we.

TIBENHAM: But you're coming back to your point that you don't really know or wish to know what the end product is going to be is for one. Your attitude is surely: don't ask too many questions.

WALTI: No. How should we know, really, what they intend to do with it; what they want to do with it.

TIBENHAM: You're saying you have no idea at all.

WALTI: No.

TIBENHAM: This ability not to know makes life easier for Mr Butt in his role as chief buyer. He's still attached to the embassy in Paris and still placing orders. One of his recent ones was a small quantities of uranium-235 and plutonium. They were, he said, to be used by Pakistani students. So Mr Butt had acquired the machinery and his bosses had the expertise. But they were no use without the raw material. He came to this office in Duesseldorf in search of, among other things, uranium yellow cake.

ALFRED HEMPEL: He was a member of the Pakistan embassy and he is authorised to negotiate with that material and he is buying that material for the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission.

TIBENHAM: When he telephoned to press the order was he more interested in the hexofloride or the yellow cake, did he say what he wanted?

HEMPEL: Also...exactly he did not say it, but I believe he was more interested in yellow cake.

TIBENHAM: In the end, Mr Butt and the Pakistanis found a very different supplier for their yellow cake. The source of limitless uranium for Pakistan is appropriately the Islamic Republic of Niger. Deep below the Sahara there is more uranium than the Pakistanis will ever need to build their bomb. The company mining the uranium is French and is headed by M.Jack Giscard d'Estaing, cousin of the French President. The site's stranded in the middle of the blistering desert, hundreds of miles from the nearest town. In temperatures which often touch a-hundred-and-twenty, thousands of local labourers, supervised by French engineers, continually inhale hot dust as they extract the uranium. The billions of tons already extracted have left a monstrous crater in the desert.

FB

PHILIP TIBENHAM: The ore is processed on the spot under strict French control into yellow cake. The Islamic Republic of Niger takes its share of the mine's output. Almost all of that is sold to her Islamic brother states, Libya and Pakistan. Some of Pakistan's uranium goes via France; the rest is flown out through Libya. The uranium convoy travels a-hundred-and-fifty baking miles to a barren desert air strip at Agadez. From there it's flown northwards across the vast Sahara to Tripoli, in Libya. The last leg of the uranium trail from Tripoli, three-thousand-odd miles to Karachi, in Pakistan. Now neither Niger nor Pakistan has signed the non-proliferation treaty — the NPT, an agreement which is supposed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. But once again, Pakistan agreed to safeguards over the use of its uranium and once again the words had a familiar ring. Pakistan undertook that no uranium shall be used for the manufacture of any nuclear weapon or to further any other military purpose or for the manufacture of any other nuclear explosive device. The President of Niger is Seyni Kountche. Under his firm leadership the country has gone from being one of France's poorest former colonies to being wealthy — all because of uranium sales. But he's only there by the grace of France. And more important Colonel Gaddafi supported the coup which brought Kountche to power. Gaddafi knows that as with oil, uranium means power and he'd like to become the uranium broker to the world of Islam. Kountche is the man who could help him to do it and thereby reinforce Libya's role in the Pakistani bomb. The uranium trade between Niger and Pakistan is partly the result of Libyan diplomacy. Kountche, like Gaddafi, is deeply committed to Islam. It's no coincidence that almost all of Niger's uranium goes to Libya and Pakistan.

COL.SEYNI KOUNTCHE: We sell our uranium to any country on condition that it participates in our development. Secondly, we expect our uranium to serve the interests of development not of war. And we require that the International Atomic Agency guarantees the sale. Therefore, we don't see why our selling to one particular country should create a complaint. We are selling and will continue to sell to Pakistan. If the IAEA doesn't carry out proper supervision then that's a matter for its own conscience.

TIBENHAM: The civil servants at the IAEA say they know what's happening to the uranium in Pakistan.

SIGVARD EKLUND: For the time being the uranium ore is only stored in drums; it has not been moved away.

TIBENHAM: But how d'you know that, how often do your inspectors go there?

FB

SIGVARD EKLUND: We have...that has been inspected by us. And we know that.

TIBENHAM: But how often do you go there, once a year, twice a year.

EKLUND: That again represents a confidential figure. Different installations are visited with different frequency in order to assure that we have a reasonable probability of discovering any diversion of the material.

TIBENHAM. But if that were the case you'd have to be able to account for every pound exported from Niger to Pakistan and make sure it was still there and not being used for some improper purpose.

EKLUND: May I say we should at least be secure; a pound of uranium doesn't represent a danger to mankind.

TIBENHAM: Eklund's argument would be unassailable except that large quantities of uranium now sold to Libya which then ships part of it off to Pakistan. Since Libya hasn't allowed the IAEA inspectors to check how much is left, the agency cannot know how much uranium Pakistan has acquired or what's been done with it. Each of these trucks is carrying about fifty or more drums of uranium on its way to Libya and Pakistan. According to Niger, it's sold a-hundred-and-fifty tons of concentrate to Libya and three-hundred-tons to Pakistan. Our informant says that Libya's sent large amounts of uranium to Pakistan. Gaddafi's done this, he says, to help to protect his role in the bomb project to get a return on his investment.

... The Libyans had always been doubtful about the quid pro quo. Pakistani scientists are training Libyans in laboratory hotcell operations. There is other training going on too, but the Libyans have made it plain they want what they believe they were promised: full access to the technology.

TIBENHAM: Gaddafi has another good reason for backing the Pakistani bomb: Israel. The Israelis have made it abundantly clear that if some close Arab country, like Libya or Iraq, comes near to getting the bomb, they would use their air power to remove the threat from their sphere of influence and there's no doubt that they could and would do it. But Pakistan's a different matter.

EDWARD LUTTWAK: I don't think it'll get to the point where Iraq will be within an ace of having a nuclear weapon because the Israelis will stop it. Whether this means going out to third countries and interfering with the shipment of nuclear equipment or it means going right inside Iraq and bombing the facilities — they will do it. As you know recently the Israelis have achieved a dramatic increase in the range of their air power because they're fifteens — they can reach right into the Persian Gulf.

FB

EDWARD LUTTWAK: And they have this special ordinance bombs that penetrate by .....energy.....so they have the full equipment to do it and they will do it. If it came to the crunch and they knew that Pakistani weapons have been transferred to Libya or sitting in the ship half way, they would go for the ship, obviously. If these were in a dock in Karachi waiting to go, they might go as far as there. But the further it is in Pakistan, when it is a Pakistani thing as opposed to being a Libyan-Pakistan thing, less likely they are to act because they don't feel that it is within their legitimate sphere to go that far.

PHILIP TIBENHAM: So a bomb built in the comparative security of Pakistan is still Gaddafi's best bet.

TIBENHAM: A small town of San Angelo de Gigiano, in northern Italy: it's a deeply conservative and Catholic place, but it's here that the story of the Islamic bomb's taken its most extraordinary turn. On the outskirts of town there's a medium sized engineering works. It's owned by a French company and here, we believe, the Pakistanis are trying to resurrect their original plutonium route to the bomb. Our information is that uPakistan's covertly pressing ahead with the complex reprocessing plant that the Americans thought they'd stopped. The company's called Alcom and it just started work on twenty-six vessels and tanks made from special metals to be delivered to Pakistan by next December. The order may not have seemed important, but the contract for the work was signed in April of last year. The date is significant because the very next month a confidential letter went out from Cogema, the French nuclear fuels company, to SGN, the company controlled by the French government. Persistent rumours are circulating on the Pakistan affair. Some industrialists are alleged to have directly or indirectly transferred or sold sensitive and non-sensitive material to Italian industrialists. These firms are alleged to have sent the material on to Pakistan. The boss of Alcom is Signor Aldo Torchi.

ALDO TORCHI: What is your interest in this matter. Your personal interest?

TIBENHAM: My personal interest. I'm trying to find out what sort of things Pakistan is importing and why they are importing them.

TORCHI: But I cannot give you any answer about this .....We have supplied a lot of material to Pakistan. We will supply lot of materials more to Pakistan and it is all right.

TIBENHAM: Yes, I know you supply lots of things to Pakistan, but in particular, I'm interested in this order from — what's the name of the company where this order came from last year.

TORCHI: I am sorry, but I cannot give you the information you require. I am sorry.

FB

TIBENHAM: But you told us earlier the name of the company.

TORCHI: No. No. Excuse me sir. The job is a serious matter.

TIBENHAM: What do you think these particular vessels or pull linings are for.

TORCHI: Pull.....

TIBENHAM: The things you're going to supply i.....

TORCHI: Excuse me. No.

TIBENHAM: The reason for Signor Torchi's outburst is now clear. He'd been told by his French superiors that he was to allow no filming and to make no comment. The parent company in Paris is called BSL. They were contractors in the original reprocessing plant. The management will neither confirm nor deny that they or their subsidiary is involved in the Pakistan order. One of their officials has told us off the record that all they're doing is making a perfectly innocent chemical plant. The reason they say that is that precisely what the Pakistanis have told them. But if the Pakistanis are, as we believe, trying to rise to something as complex as a reprocessing plant how would they know how to set about it? The reason is simple. Virtually all of the blue prints for the plant have already been handed over to them by the French government-controlled SGN company. But if they have the plans, as they have, is there anything that you can see that would stop them going ahead done, using what means they had at their disposal?

POINCET: I think that if you take any country that's industrially developed enough, which is the case of Pakistan. If the government decides to put its pressure to push one definite project nothing can resist; a government can do anything.

TIBENHAM: The signals are that Pakistan's already made some preparations for a bomb test. Soviet and American satellites have picked up indications of tunnelling possibly for an underground trial. The site's thought to be in the remote desert area of Chulistan. If so, there's a dreadful irony about the choice of testing ground. It's just across the border from where the Indians exploded their crude bomb. But that doesn't mean that Pakistan is aiming at the same thing.

FB

DR DONALD GEESMAN: It's just a question of how sophisticated a weapon they want to design. And they're asking the question that you've got a bunch of dummies that're going to work on it. There's no reason to think there are going to be dummies working on it. They might be just as good or better .....assess the work done at Los Alamo. There might be some guy in there that really understands how you put the temper on there and where you put the initiator. And this will get just a feeling, not hard work. It's right off the bat, they'll say, Oh yes..... hold her for about a micro-second, I think, we'll get about such and such. I mean.....Don't assume that dummies are going to work on it. If they're motivated, they may do a hell of a job of making weapons.

PHILIP TIBENHAM: We believe that in eighteen months scientists at Tinstack, the Pakistan Institute of Technology, will produce enough plutonium for their first test bomb — the bomb the West was convinced they could never make.

EDWARD LUTTWAK: You could see it when the Chinese set off their first nuclear weapon. In this country they said how can those dummies have set off a highly rich uranium weapon. They could never have figured out how to make a deffusion point. Well then, you too flew over and took a picture and it's clear in cans or province they got their enrichment pocint. I mean it's convenient.....(music)

TIBENHAM: Whether or not Zia survives as Pakistan's leader, he's placed an impossible burden on the country. Once the bomb is known to exist, he or whoever succeeds him, will face enormous problems. Instead of creating security, the weapon will do quite the opposite. Libya will demand a return for all her help in the form of nuclear expertise. If the bomb is there, the military will want to test it. With mistrustful India on her doorstep that could be a disasterous move.

... Detonating the device would give one warning that ex-months, years down the road they will have a real weapon. They have a weapon or the device. And during that intervening period the pressure on India to act to disarm the Pakistanis will be enormous. The conflict between the two countries is potentially a fatal conflict. It's about the existence of Pakistan, not about any dispute or border problem and there's always the possibility that the Indians will not allow the Pakistanis to make a transition from crude device to the weapon and that means war.

TIBENHAM: When the dream of the Islamic Bomb was born Ali Bhutto promised "we shall have the bomb even if we have to eat grass to get it". Pakistan may find there's no grass to eat.

FB.