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# Shopping For Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, And The Rise And Fall Of The A.Q. Khan Network

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**Shopping for Bombs:  
Nuclear Proliferation,  
Global Insecurity, and the  
Rise and Fall of the A. Q.  
Khan Network**

*GORDON CORERA*

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## **Synopsis**

A.Q. Khan was the world's leading black market dealer in nuclear technology, described by a former CIA Director as "at least as dangerous as Osama bin Laden." A hero in Pakistan and revered as the Father of the Bomb, Khan built a global clandestine network that sold the most closely guarded nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea, and Libya. Here for the first time is the riveting inside story of the rise and fall of A.Q. Khan and his role in the devastating spread of nuclear technology over the last thirty years. Drawing on exclusive interviews with key players in Islamabad, London, and Washington, as well as with members of Khan's own network, BBC journalist Gordon Corera paints a truly unsettling picture of the ultimate arms bazaar. Corera reveals how Khan operated within a world of shadowy deals among rogue states and how his privileged position in Pakistan provided him with the protection to build his unique and deadly business empire. It explains why and how he was able to operate so freely for so many years. Brimming with revelations, the book provides new insight into Iran's nuclear ambitions and how close Tehran may be to the bomb. In addition, the book contains startling new information on how the CIA and MI6 penetrated Khan's network, how the U.S. and UK ultimately broke Khan's ring, and how they persuaded Pakistan's President Musharraf to arrest a national hero. The book also provides the first detailed account of the high-wire dealings with Muammar Gadaffi, which led to Libya's renunciation of nuclear weapons and which played a key role in Khan's downfall. The spread of nuclear weapons technology around the globe presents the greatest security challenge of our time. Shopping for Bombs presents a unique window into the challenges of stopping a new nuclear arms race, a race that A.Q. Khan himself did more than any other individual to promote.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Corera, a security correspondent for the BBC, offers a measured account of how a young Pakistani metallurgist named A.Q. Khan became the world's leading dealer in nuclear technology. The story starts as Khan watched Pakistan lose the 1971 war with India and vowed to help prevent it from happening again. Three years later, as India tested its first nuclear device, he offered Prime Minister Bhutto his help in creating the Muslim world's first nuclear bomb. In 1975, when his Dutch employer discovered Khan had stolen centrifuge designs, he fled to Pakistan. Though he was tried in absentia in 1983, it wasn't until January 2004, under pressure from the U.S. and Britain, that he was arrested for 30 years of selling nuclear materials and designs to Libya, North Korea and Iran. By the mid-1980s, Corera points out, the U.S. was aware that Pakistan had produced weapons-grade uranium. Drawing on CIA and diplomatic accounts of the spread of technology, Corera also examines why the Americans initially looked the other way as Pakistan joined forces in arming the mujahideen in Afghanistan before becoming an ally in the hunt for bin Laden. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"It is tempting to demonize A.Q. Khan, the Pakistani engineer who became infamous for selling nuclear weapons designs and production equipment to North Korea, Iran, Libya and perhaps others. If Khan is written off as simply evil, then his deeds can be written off as peculiar sins that do not reflect flaws in the international system. Unfortunately, life is more complicated, as the BBC reporter Gordon Corera vividly narrates in his fine new book. Shopping for Bombs is more than the fast-paced story of an alarming proliferation network and the conditions that let it flourish. Corera also offers a fascinating, detailed account of how Libya surprised the world with its undetected nuclear acquisitions and how the United States and Britain secretly persuaded Moammar Gaddafi to verifiably give them up. Corera takes readers briskly through real policy conundrums without lapsing into wonk talk."--George Perkovich, Washington Post Book World"A measured account of how a young Pakistani metallurgist became the world's leading dealer in nuclear technology. Drawing on CIA and diplomatic accounts of the spread of technology, Corera examines why the Americans initially looked the other way as Pakistan joined forces in arming the mujahideen in Afghanistan before becoming an ally in the hunt for bin Laden."--Publishers Weekly"A page-turner."--The Economist"Shopping for Bombs tells a disturbing tale.... From the 1970s through the 1990s, Khan

secretly disseminated nuclear technology to a number of rogue states around the world. The full story of Khan's activities cannot yet be fully told--much information is under lock and key in Pakistan, if it has been preserved at all--but a persuasive preliminary account has been prepared by Gordon Corera."--The Wall Street Journal"Gordon Corera has written a book you will not be able to put down. It reads like a thriller, but it is true! He has done an impressive job in researching and describing the extraordinary threat we face from nuclear weapons falling into the hands of those who wish us harm."--Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Distinguished Service Professor, Harvard University and author of *The Power Game: A Washington Novel*"A superb account of how A.Q. Khan, the pioneer of nuclear black marketeering, exploited the forces of globalization and loopholes in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to provide what IAEA Secretary General, Mohamed El-Baradei, called the 'Wal-Mart of private sector proliferation'."--Graham Allison, Douglas Dillon Professor, J. F. K. School of Government, Harvard University"Reads like a thriller. Corera's story, about one of the greatest threats to international security of which I am aware, is chilling and disturbing. As a former practitioner in the field, and one who has remained a close observer of issues related to nuclear proliferation, I found *Shopping for Bombs* a great read; it is detailed and well sourced, and full of useful insights. For anyone interested in understanding the character of the threat posed by nuclear proliferation today, it is essential reading."--Ambassador Robert L. Gallucci, Dean, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University"Corera's book magnificently sheds light on the activities of A.Q. Khan and rogue regimes around the world. In today's world of heightened nuclear tensions, this invaluable exposÃ© represents a must-read for both policymakers and the general public." --Steven Emerson, author of *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us*"*Shopping for Bombs* is a clearly written and fascinating account of one of the most important episodes in the history of weapons of mass destruction--Pakistan's illicit and successful effort to build nuclear weapons and then to spread nuclear materials across the globe, an effort spearheaded by the maverick scientist A.Q. Khan. Corera has produced an even handed and absorbing history of that important story."--Peter Bergen, fellow of the New America Foundation and author of *The Osama bin Laden I Know and Holy War, Inc.*

This book was written by a reporter working for the BBC. It investigates how Pakistan set up its nuclear program and succeeded in producing the A-bomb, thanks in large part to the project's mastermind: Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan. The author draws on a wide range of sources for his research, including: press articles, interviews, academic scholarship, TV bulletins, and reports published by various NGOs and UN institutions. Corera chronicles his book as a loose biography of Dr. Khan.

Beginning in the early 1970s, he describes how Khan studied metallurgical engineering at Dutch and German universities. Khan decided to keep illegal copies of important research data. This policy of storing sensitive information was of great importance in Khan's career, and was the source of his later political influence. It opened the doors of Pakistan's elite to him, and led to his appointment as director of the country's covert nuclear program. Thanks to his political connections, Khan succeeded in forming a secret network of states (Iran, Libya, North Korea) providing him with uranium enrichment and fusion technology in exchange for money and military equipment. This business was never an ongoing operation, and was conducted on an ad hoc basis to avoid detection. Khan amassed a fortune in the process. The research in this book clearly indicates that Khan was given carte blanche to develop his activities by successive Pakistani governments. The secret services (ISI) regularly collaborated and planned operations with him. Khan was appointed as the director of his own research facility (Khan Research Laboratories) with de-facto complete independence from the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (which has links with western institutions). Despite the fact that most western intelligence agencies had knowledge of his activities, it wasn't until after Pakistan successfully conducted its first nuclear tests in 1998 that Khan's days became numbered. Following mounting US pressure, Khan was placed under house arrest in 2004 and later "confessed" his guilt on Pakistani television. He was pardoned by Pervez Musharraf, and remains a national hero for many Pakistanis. The principal drawback of this book is that even though it presents a damning indictment of the West's inaction over Pakistan's illegal nuclear program, its perspective remains strongly western. This transpires in Corera's discussion of how Khan's televised admission of guilt was received in Pakistan itself. The author never really asks himself why thousands of Pakistanis admire this man, and why Pakistan felt it needed to build the bomb (although he does mention India). Furthermore, Corera probably didn't travel to places like Iran, Libya, and North Korea to collect information for his book. This limits his neutrality somewhat; but given the sensitive nature of the topic, only an insider could really give you the full story. All in all, this is an interesting read. It's unlikely that details of Khan's program will emerge soon, which makes this book even more germane. Considering the West's recent threats of intervention against Iran's nuclear program, one wonders why there is so little outrage over Pakistan. A question of double-standards no doubt. Should you develop a further interest in Pakistan, then I strongly recommend you pick up "Crossed Swords" by Shuja Nawaz - a very thorough examination of Pakistan's army.

This is a good book which illustrates how short term policy making by the U.S. and other world

powers allowed a complex and effective nuclear proliferation network to occur. It also points out that capitalistic greed by companies based in Europe allowed the sale of components which can and were likely to be used for the enrichment of uranium to weapons grade fissile material, demonstrating the loop holes in international trade regulation.

I've used this is an upper-level undergraduate course on International Security with great success. The students enjoyed the journalistic style (compared to our other texts), but absorbed a lot of the details. It was one of the best-received texts for the course. Best for class sizes that allow substantial discussion.

This is a fascinating book about an individual I knew nothing about. This is a fast read and would recommend it for anyone serving or studying abroad.

The critics on the back cover of the book rave about it being all exciting, but I felt like it dragged on. It is very detailed and informative, and helps put the entire situation of AQ Khan and his proliferation threat into perspective.

Gordon Corera's book "Shopping For Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, and the Rise and Fall of the A. Q. Khan Network" is an interesting read and offers a good history of what has gone wrong in the attempt to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. What is apparent from reading this book is that while A. Q. Khan is the face of what went wrong; if it hadn't been him then it would have been someone else. The book is divided into two fairly simple sections, "Rise" and "Fall". The "Rise" section covers the development of the bomb in Pakistan, as well as the development of Khan's network to sell the information. The "Fall" section details the discovery of the network, and the actions, often painfully slow, to deal with the issue by the U.S. and other western countries. A. Q. Khan is an interesting person. Clearly he is very intelligent, but at times a bit careless and foolhardy. He used his circumstances and the political situation in the world skillfully to get the technology and money and other resources from numerous sources. He allowed the development in Pakistan to be looked at as the creation of an "Islamic Bomb" to other Muslim countries, but had no issue with dealing with North Korea as well, and so in his way he was simply a capitalist, dealing in a product which was not approved of in the west. He also used capitalism in the west to purchase what he needed. Companies would sell it to him, because otherwise someone else would, and if something was completely prohibited, then he would buy the components. From a perspective of stopping

Pakistan and Khan, attempts were made, and even successful for periods of time, but what happened again and again was that more immediate concerns would trump non-proliferation goals. Whether it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or the perceived terror threat after September 11th, time and time again the U.S. Government, and the Europeans would have their attentions focused elsewhere and Pakistan and Khan were not their biggest problem, and that Pakistan was too useful in dealing with other issues to crack down on them."Shopping for Bombs" covers a very interesting subject and the events within it will continue to shape our world for a long time to come. If non-proliferation is important, what can we do to keep focus on that issue, or is the genie out of the bottle now and we simply have to live with the fact that any country and perhaps any organization, can procure nuclear weapons if they have the funds and the will? It is not an easy question to answer, and the answers may not be easy to live with. The writing in this book was a bit repetitive for my tastes, but definitely readable. It probably could have been significantly shorter without the repetition of events, and perhaps it was put in to pad the book to about 250 pages. It does have a good set of notes though, and I would give it three and a half stars if I could, but they don't allow that so I am rounding down to three.

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