



# Fallout: The True Story of the CIA's Secret War on Nuclear Trafficking

*Catherine Collins, Douglas Frantz*

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FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, while the Central Intelligence Agency turned a dismissive eye, a globe-straddling network run by Pakistani scientist A. Q. Khan sold the equipment and expertise to make nuclear weapons to a rogues' gallery of nations. Among its known customers were Iran, Libya, and North Korea. When the United States finally took action to stop the network in late 2003, President George W. Bush declared the end of the global enterprise to be a major intelligence victory that had made the world safer.

But, as investigative journalists Catherine Collins and Douglas Frantz document masterfully, the claim that Khan's operation had been dismantled was a classic case of too little, too late. Khan's ring had, by then, sold Iran the technology to bring Tehran to the brink of building a nuclear weapon. It had also set loose on the world the most dangerous nuclear secrets imaginable—sophisticated weapons designs, blueprints for uranium enrichment plants, plans for warheads—all for sale to the highest bidder. Relying on explosive new information gathered in exclusive interviews with key participants and previously undisclosed, highly confidential documents, the authors expose the truth behind the elaborate efforts by the CIA to conceal the full extent of the damage done by Khan's network and to cover up how the profound failure to stop the atomic bazaar much earlier jeopardizes our national security today.

Fallout takes readers inside the CIA's covert operation to penetrate the Khan network and exposes the agency's desperate and ultimately flawed plans to sabotage the nuclear programs of Iran and Libya. In vivid scenes and convincing detail, the book reveals how the CIA recruited a family of Swiss nuclear traffickers to spy on Khan and help bring down parts of his operation. Collins and Frantz also take readers behind closed doors in the hallowed halls of power in Washington and other world capitals, where they chronicle how the U.S. intelligence agency later enlisted the most senior officials of the Bush administration to protect CIA assets by pressuring the Swiss government to destroy a staggering amount of evidence and derail the planned prosecution of a team of U.S. intelligence agents who violated Swiss laws.

More than a high-stakes espionage thriller, *Fallout* painstakingly examines the huge costs of the CIA's errors and the lost opportunities to halt the spread of nuclear weapons technology long before it was made available to some of the most dangerous and reckless adversaries of the United States and its allies. At its heart, this book stands as a sober warning to citizens and policymakers in the United States and throughout the world. Only sheer luck has allowed us to avoid a nuclear catastrophe so far. If failures like those recounted in *Fallout* are not remedied, and if fighting nuclear proliferation does not become the number one priority of the world's governments, we will assuredly run out of luck one of these days.

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From FALLOUT

In any intelligence operation, the people running it must recognize that there are elements that they do not know. The key to a successful outcome is minimizing the risks associated with those unknowns. In the case of Khan's nuclear ring, the CIA officials knew they would have only one shot at closing down the network.

If they missed a major customer or a huge shipment of deadly technology—if some major unknown existed—what they were hoping would be a major intelligence victory could turn into a career-ending embarrassment and yet another in a series of failed missions that had dogged the CIA over the years. Far worse, the failure to identify and stop another country or even a terrorist organization with access to the means to build an atomic weapon would be a colossal risk to international security. It also would contribute to the potential resurgence of the nuclear proliferation ring the CIA hoped to eliminate.

There had been clues in recent weeks that the Tinners had not been telling their handlers everything. As the clock wound down, it was imperative that the agency find a way to verify what they were hearing—and determine what, if anything, these particular spies were leaving out.



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**Ila Robinette:**

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