



Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?

Brian Michael Jenkins

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According to a British intelligence report leaked to the press in 2007, al Qaeda operatives are planning a large-scale attack "on par with Hiroshima and Nagasaki." How likely is it that terrorists will develop the capability of such an attack? No one understands the nature of the threat posed by nuclear terrorism better than Brian Michael Jenkins—one of the world's most renowned experts on terrorism. For more than thirty years, he has been advising the military, government, and prestigious think tanks on the dangers of escalating terrorism.

Jenkins goes beyond what the experts know about terrorists' efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, nuclear black markets, "suitcase bombs," and mysterious substances like red mercury to examine how terrorists themselves think about such weapons. He offers many insights into such vital questions as:

- Do terrorists see nuclear weapons as instruments of coercion or of pure destruction? • Are those we label religious fanatics constrained by political and strategic calculations?
- If a nuclear attack took place on American soil, what life-and-death decisions would the president be forced to make? He puts the reader in the position of the president to convey the immediacy of making decisions—and the perilous repercussions of each critical decision.

Jenkins notes that terrorists have become increasingly adept at creating an atmosphere of nuclear terror. In fact, al Qaeda may have succeeded in becoming the world's first terrorist nuclear power without possessing a single nuclear weapon. The psychological effects of nuclear terror are fueled by American culture, which churns out novels and movies in which every conceivable horror scenario is played out. Political factions on both the right and the left also view nuclear terrorism as fodder to support their own arguments. In such an atmosphere, it is difficult for the average citizen to separate real from imagined dangers. Jenkins's informed and seasoned analysis will give all Americans a levelheaded understanding of the real situation and teach us how not to yield to nuclear terror.

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