



Could Terrorists Acquire and Detonate Nuclear Weapons? A Scenario

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Introduction

- A desire to kill as many as possible
- Acquisition of plutonium or Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU)
- People with Requisite Skills set
- Transportation to the target city



Introduction

- Scenario – New York
- Political reaction after London attacks
- Danger to human rights



Desire to Inflict Mass Casualties

- 1993 – World Trade Center Bomb. Yousef stated that he'd planned to kill 250,000
- 1988 – bombings East Africa killing 300
- 2001 – 9/11 nearly 3000 people perished
- 2001 - Richard Reid
- 2001 – Sajid Badat
- 2002 - Mombassa MANPAD attacks & Paradise Hotel attack



Desire to Inflict Mass Casualties

- 2003 – Casablanca attacks 45 dead
- 2003 – Istanbul attacks 50 + dead
- 2004 – Superferry 14 attack 100+ killed
- 2004 – Madrid attacks, nearly 200 killed
- 2005 – London attacks, 56 died
- 2005 – Amman attacks at wedding, 56 died



Desire to Inflict Mass Casualties

- 2006 – London ‘Airport’ arrests – if successful deaths on scale of 9/11?
- 2007 – Glasgow and London attacks



AQ's Desire to Obtain Nuclear Devices

- Reports of Bin Laden seeking nuclear weapons as far back as mid nineties



AQ's Desire to Obtain Nuclear Devices

- 1998 Bin Laden (BL) interview with Al Jazeera (AJ)
- AJ: “Can this be taken as confirmation that you are seeking to acquire this [nuclear] weapon?”
- BL: “There is a duty on Muslims to acquire them...by the Grace of God Almighty”



AQ's Desire to Obtain Nuclear Devices

- 2002 AQ Spokesman Suleiman Gheith:
- “We have not reached parity with them. We have the right to kill 4 million Americans – 2 million of them children – and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of thousands.”



AQ's Desire to Obtain Nuclear Devices

- 2003 Sheikh Nasir Bin Hamd Al-Fahd published 'The Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction Against Infidels':
- “If a bomb that killed 10 million of them and burned as much of their land as they have burned Muslims’ land were dropped on them, it would be permissible, with no need to mention any other argument”



AQ's Desire to Obtain Nuclear Devices

- Michael Scheuer (former head of the CIA's Bin Laden unit), *Marching Towards Hell*, 2008:
- "...it is impossible to argue that Bin Laden is not pursuing such a weapon or that Al-Qaeda would not use it if acquired"



AQ's Desire to Obtain Nuclear Devices

- Micah Zenko, who reviewed declassified intelligence estimates, 2006:
- “terrorists groups are obsessed with obtaining a nuclear weapon.”



How Could a Device Be Obtained?

- Construct one themselves
- Be given one by a 'rogue state'
- Steal one



How Could a Device Be Obtained?

- Construction
 - Differing opinions: Bunn, Venter, Barnaby
 - Bunn: a sophisticated terrorist group could construct a nuclear device if they had the necessary material
 - Venter: “urban legend” that a “good university with an advanced scientific facility could... build the bomb”
 - Barnaby: “a group of two or three people with appropriate skills could design and fabricate a crude nuclear explosive.”



How Could a Device Be Obtained?

- 2001 two Pakistani nuclear scientists held talks with Bin Laden
- AQ Khan network a 'nuclear Wal Mart'
- CIA Director George Tenet described Khan as "at least as dangerous as Osama Bin Laden"



How Could a Device Be Obtained?

- Could terrorists obtain Highly Enriched Uranium or plutonium?
- Bunn: Yes – example of Pelindaba
- Example: Khinsagov
- Rogue States issue



Could a Nuclear Device Be Transported?

- US land boundaries of over 12,000 kms and coastline of nearly 20,000 kms
- ABC news test



The Scenario



What Happened After London Attacks?

- David Davis
- Home Office plans
- Lord Tebbit



What Happened After London Attacks?

- Populus Survey one year after:
 - 79% of Muslims surveyed said they were experiencing more abuse and hostility since the attacks
 - 74% believed that they were viewed with suspicion by their fellow citizens



Danger to Human Rights

- Paul Wilkinson
- Geoffrey Robertson
- Waleed Aly
- Philip Bobbitt
- Julian Burnside



Conclusion

- AQ Has discussed obtaining nuclear weapons
- Some experts believe that terrorists could obtain, transport and detonate a nuclear device
- If it happens there will be calls for stronger counter terrorism legislation
- Any new legislation should be proportionate and not serve to radicalise