

Terrorism and the Continuing Threat from Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),
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What do the the international experts on terrorism believe? The Central Intelligence Agency in the USA has said for decades that terrorist interest in weapons of mass destruction or WMD is growing. When former Secretary of Defence Robert Gates was asked in 2010 by the media what kept him up at night, Gates replied, "It's the thought of a terrorist ending up with a weapon of mass destruction, especially nuclear."

There's a reason why Gates responded in such a way.

And yet, it has been over many years since such assessments about the use of WMD by terrorists began to be publicised. There still has been no major WMD attack by any terrorist group in the world to date. Still, Gates knows what the threat really is.

The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) was launched specifically to understand these potential threats. In the Nuclear Materials Security Index (2014), its Co-Chairman and former US Senator Sam Nunn claimed,

"Today, nearly 2,000 metric tons of weapons-usable nuclear materials . . . are stored at hundreds of sites around the world".

Some of those materials, according to Nunn, are poorly secured and vulnerable to theft or sale on the black market. Terrorist organisations have plainly stated their desire to use nuclear weapons, and Nunn says that the terrorists need not go where there is the most material; they will go where the material is most vulnerable.

Just because an attack with WMD has not taken place doesn't mean to say the threat has gone away, and that doesn't mean that terrorists have not got WMD already. The proof that WMD are indeed available to be acquired comes from the CIA itself.

The World Factbook also known as the **CIA World Factbook** is a reference resource produced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with almanac-style information about the countries of the world. *The Factbook* is partially updated every week. It provides a two- to three-page summary of the demographics, geography, communications, government, economy, and military of each of 267 international entities including U.S.-recognised countries, dependencies, and other areas in the world.

It is prepared by the CIA for the use of U.S. government officials, however, it is frequently used as a resource for academic research papers and news articles. As a work of the U.S. government, it is in the public domain in the United States.

In one entry entitled "[Appendix A: Chronology of Nuclear Smuggling Incidents](#)" it lists literally that – reported nuclear smuggling incidents and the continuing threat from weapons of mass destruction.

The Cold War was a state of geopolitical tension after World War II between powers in the Eastern Bloc and powers in the Western Bloc that lasted from 1947 to 1991.

The CIA Factbook lists a number of years of incidents. Here are just some of the more interesting ones from incidents reported in just one year. One has to say though that the total number of reported incidents in this document only covers the years 1993 – 1996 – further research is required of the FactBook to find more incidents. But this highlights the extreme dangers of having nuclear material in the first place.

December 1995

A former Greenpeace president revealed that the organization had been offered a nuclear warhead by a disgruntled former Soviet officer keen to highlight lax security, according to press accounts. The former Greenpeace official stated in a recently published book that a Soviet officer with access to nuclear weapons offered Greenpeace an 800 kg nuclear Scud warhead for public display in Berlin. The offer was made shortly before 7 September 1991.

November 1995

Italian prosecutors reportedly have asked Spanish authorities for permission to question the Archbishop of Barcelona about his role in an international criminal syndicate involved in smuggling radioactive materials, according to Italian press accounts. Accusations against the Archbishop arose after Italian officials tapped a telephone conversation in which the Archbishop was named as playing a leading role in the criminal enterprise. Both the Archbishop and the Vatican have vehemently denied the accusations. The Spanish Justice ministry has characterized the Italian request as "not very well thought out." The Italian investigation grew out of an earlier probe into money laundering operations which reportedly uncovered information that a criminal enterprise involving a self-professed Italian intelligence official, was attempting to sell 7.5 kg osmium for \$63,000 per gram, according to Italian press accounts.

1994 – updated November 1995

The German parliamentary commission investigating the 1994 plutonium smuggling incident, reportedly has uncovered German government documents indicating that the three smugglers offered to supply 11 kilograms of Russian-origin, weapons-grade plutonium, which they claimed was enough to build three nuclear weapons, according to press reports.

December 1995

According to press reports, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested nine members of a criminal organization in Novosibirsk and seized a quantity of radioactive material. The material was identified in press reports as "enriched" uranium-235. The material had been transported to Novosibirsk by middlemen, possibly from Kazakhstan. The ultimate destination may have been South Korea, according to press reports.

December 1995

Italian prosecutors have arrested an individual, Roger D'Onofrio, with reported links to the U S Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Italian-American mafia as part of their investigation of smuggling radioactive materials, money-laundering and arms trafficking. D'Onofrio, 72, reportedly has dual Italian and U.S. citizenship and retired from the CIA only two years ago. The ring he is alleged to have been part of is said to have been active from the early 1990s up to this year. Italian investigators reportedly suspect that D'Onofrio is the mastermind behind an international ring which laundered dirty money and smuggled gold, weapons, and radioactive material. His name also appears in another investigation into an arms smuggling operation between Italy and the Middle East, according to press reports. D'Onofrio was taken into preventive custody on charges of money laundering and acting as a broker in illegal currency dealing. According to press, the prosecutors had so far ascertained money laundering for over 2.5 billion dollars on behalf of secret service and organised crime sources in complicity with diplomats, the ruling families in Kuwait, Morocco and Zambia, bankers, prelates and others.

UPDATE (7 Nov 95): A German court sentenced Adolph Jaekle, a German businessman, to 5 1/2 years in prison for smuggling weapons grade plutonium into the country, according to press reports. Investigators made the first in a series of contraband plutonium seizures in Germany when they raided Jaekle's home, in the southern town of Tengen in May, 1994, and found a lead cylinder containing 6.15 grams of plutonium 239. Jaekle had pleaded not guilty to the plutonium charge, arguing that he did not know what the substance was.

October 1995

Russian mafia figures reportedly were behind the 1993 theft of radioactive beryllium from a Russian nuclear laboratory and the failed attempt to sell the material in the West, according to press reports. The theft, which was widely reported in 1993, was seized by police in Lithuania and remains today in the bank vault where it was first discovered. According to press, the smugglers were preparing to sell the beryllium to an Austrian middleman who in turn had a mystery buyer who reportedly was willing to pay as much as \$24 million for the material. The buyer, although never identified, was said to be Korean. Beryllium, which is used in missile guidance systems, is a highly efficient neutron reflector, according to public statements by nuclear scientists.

April 1995

Slovak police culminated a long investigation with the discovery of 18.39kg of nuclear material, 17.5 kg of which apparently is U-238, in a car stopped near Poprad in eastern Slovakia. Altogether, three Hungarians, four Slovaks, and two Ukrainians were arrested. This gang was connected to three other nuclear material smuggling incidents.

April 1995

Documents recovered by Japanese police in the investigation of Aum Shinrikyo involvement in the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack reportedly indicated that the terrorists were collecting information on uranium enrichment and laser beam technologies. A spokesman for Russia's prestigious nuclear physics laboratory, Kurchatov Institute, acknowledged that at least one Aum Shinrikyo follower was working at the institute .

January 1995

Italian police arrested one Nicola Todesco for murder in a plutonium smuggling case gone awry when the murder victim did not have the money to pay for a quantity of plutonium smuggled out of Bulgaria. Todesco claimed he threw 5g of plutonium into the Adige river, but no trace of it was found after an extensive search. (Comment: Although an official Italian spokesman believed the plutonium was “enriched for military use,” it had not been analyzed and may be another scam involving ‘plutonium screws’ from smoke detectors.

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