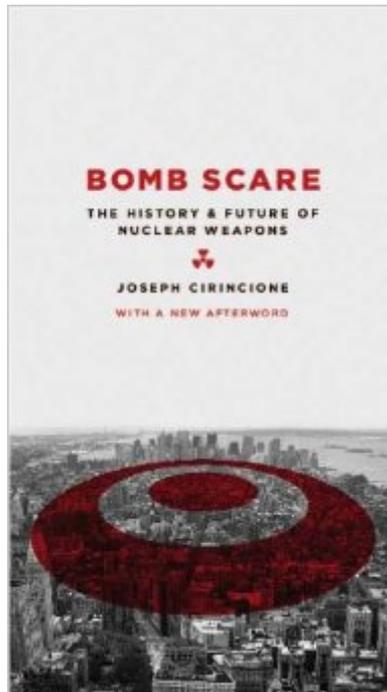


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# Bomb Scare: The History And Future Of Nuclear Weapons



## Synopsis

Since their inception, nuclear weapons have multiplied at an alarming rate, leaving everyone from policymakers to concerned citizens wondering what it will take to slow, stop, or even reverse their spread. With clarity and expertise, Joseph Cirincione presents an even-handed look at the history of nuclear proliferation and an optimistic vision of its future, providing a comprehensive survey of the wide range of critical perspectives. Cirincione begins with the first atomic discoveries of the 1930s and covers the history of their growth all the way to current crisis with Iran. He unravels the science, strategy, and politics that have fueled the development of nuclear stockpiles and increased the chance of a nuclear terrorist attack. He also explains why many nations choose not to pursue nuclear weapons and pulls from this the outlines of a solution to the world's proliferation problem: a balance of force and diplomacy, enforcement and engagement that yields a steady decrease in these deadly arsenals. Though nuclear weapons have not been used in war since August 1945, there is no guarantee this good fortune will continue. A unique blend of history, theory, and security analysis, *Bomb Scare* is an engaging text that not only supplies the general reader and student with a clear understanding of this issue but also provides a set of tools policymakers and scholars can use to prevent the cataclysmic consequences of another nuclear attack.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book deals with something that most of us don't spend much time thinking about. We should think about it more. Cirincione, the former director of the Nonproliferation Project at the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace, takes the reader through the history of the development of nuclear weapons and the arms control agreements that have somewhat curtailed their spread. He presents a rational analysis of the drivers that cause states to seek to acquire nuclear weapons as well as the barriers that motivate some to turn away from the quest, or abandon it altogether. And in the light of reasoned consideration he concludes, "The good news is that the nonproliferation regime has worked. The nuclear threat is less severe today than it was in 1970 when the Non-Proliferation Treaty entered into force". He bases this assessment on the fact that "the number of nuclear weapons in the world has declined from a peak of 65,000 in 1986, to roughly 27,000 today". But does this necessarily make the world a safer place? Cirincione takes satisfaction that "the threat of a global thermonuclear war is now near zero". He goes on to state, "The dangers we face today are very serious, but they are orders of magnitude less severe than those we confronted just two decades ago from the overkill potential of U.S. and Russian arsenals. We no longer worry about the fate of the earth, but we still worry about the fate of our cities". It is in the ensuing discussion of nuclear terrorism that the upbeat tenor of the author's faith in the potential of negotiations and agreements to manage the imminent threat increasingly seems disconnected from reality. While it is true that the threat of global thermonuclear war has diminished, the probability all out nuclear war was always very low as a result of the Strangelovian logic of mutually assured destruction. On the other hand, the likelihood of the detonation of a nuclear weapon smuggled into an American city by terrorists in the next decade is clearly significant. While such an event would not be the end of life on this planet, its societal, economic and political consequences would almost certainly be the end of life as we have come to know it. And, millions of people would die. This being the case, how can the author argue that the world is safer now than it was twenty years ago? Cirincione also contends that the reduction in ballistic missiles is an indicator of a reduction of risk in the present day. What he neglects to consider is that weapons dispatched through alternate means - say in shipping containers with GPS activation - do not leave a return address, and as a result would not invite immediate retaliation. It would seem that a country hostile to the United States could launch such an attack with an impunity that would be inconceivable were the method of delivery a ballistic missile. In this context it's hard to buy into the author's upbeat assessment of the future. As he would have it, securing existing weapons and stocks of fissile materials, new rounds of negotiations employing various carrots and sticks, and the good example of further disarmament by the US and Russia hold the promise of a better and a safer world. The problem is that while these actions are indeed necessary they are certainly not sufficient to produce the intended outcome. This is particularly the case given that some future nuclear adversaries may hold

to apocalyptic world views. Towards the end of the book Cirincione writes, "After wading through the history, theory, dangers, challenges and failures of proliferation policy, most readers could be excused for feeling a bit depressed. Don't be". I guess I just can't help it. I am.

This book reviews the history of nuclear weapons and nonproliferation agreements and offers some solutions to the threat of nuclear terrorism as well as ideas to address lack of security of the nuclear fuel supply and preventing the development of new nuclear-weapon states. Cirincione clearly knows his policy issues and history. As often happens with policy-trained writers, however, some of the technical details get garbled: a discussion of assembly timing issues in the gun and implosion mechanisms of Little Boy and Fat Man are sufficiently garbled as to indicate that the author is unaware of the crucial role of spontaneous fission, and one also finds the patently incorrect assertion that the Sun will be able to synthesize elements as heavy as sulfur. These are quibbles in comparison to the grand themes of nonproliferation and disarmament, but one would expect an author of this experience to be more careful: policy issues can hang on technicalities. For the physics, read Bernstein, Serber, Garwin & Charpak and Hoddeson, et al. Cirincione proposes a multi-national system of assured nuclear fuel services, a sort of updated Baruch plan minus any requirement or incentive for current nuclear weapon states to decrease their arsenals. He is silent, however, concerning the resistance such a scheme would likely face from likely US suspicion of a UN-administered program and the vested interests of producers and consumers of nuclear materials and weapons. He also does not address what to do with waste fuel, not a gram of which seems likely to see the inside of Yucca Mountain anytime soon. His suggestion that Israel consider abandoning its nuclear capability without proposals for security guarantees from its neighbors seems divorced from reality.

This book contains a useful brief history of nuclear weapons. It reminds us of the massive arms build-up of the 1950s and 1960s and how the world came to the brink of annihilation in the Cuban missile program. It also puts into perspective international nonproliferation efforts which have enjoyed considerable success in slowing the spread of such weapons. Finally, it reminds us that arms control agreements beginning in the 1970s and accelerating in the late 1980s have dramatically reduced stockpiles making us all safer. Latter chapters look at the Iraqi nuclear program and rehash tired arguments about the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq without adding anything new. I have two main criticisms. First, we don't get enough detail about how nuclear weapons spread to Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea and elsewhere. We hear nothing about the Israeli program;

likewise there is no real assessment of the state of the North Korean program. The author seems relatively complacent about the Iranian program, contrary to other sources who believe it is well-advanced and on the brink of producing a weapon within two or three years. Second, the book often reads like a policy-wonk briefing paper from a Washington think-tank (which I guess it is). The author could and should have tried harder to write regular English for ordinary readers.

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