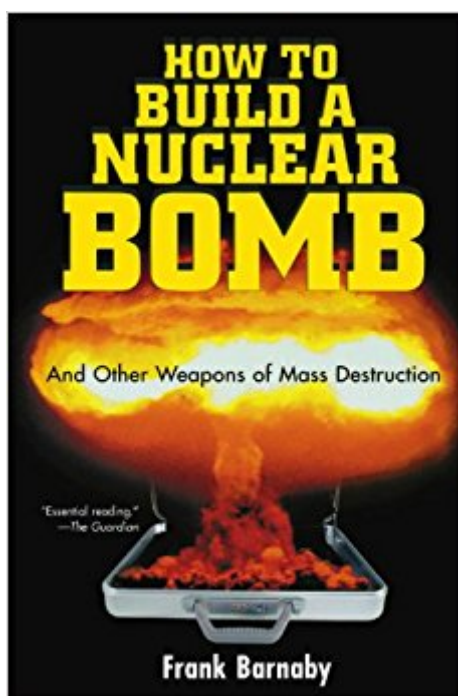


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# How To Build A Nuclear Bomb: And Other Weapons Of Mass Destruction (Nation Books)



## Synopsis

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are the greatest threat to national security in the twenty-first century. *How to Build a Nuclear Bomb* explains what it takes for a rogue state or terrorist group to obtain and use them. But nuclear weapons and terrorism expert Frank Barnaby has not written a collection of scare stories. His purpose in *How to Build a Nuclear Bomb* is to counteract the "misinformation, often put out for propaganda purposes" and general ignorance on this most urgent of topics. Barnaby describes, in straightforward, non-sensational terms what is involved when a state or a terrorist group sets out to make a weapon of mass destruction, what they are capable of doing, and what is needed to produce one. By outlining the parameters of the problem, Barnaby is able to accurately gauge the threat that WMD pose, arguing that counterterrorist measures urgently need to be stepped up to meet the challenges of a new era of international terror.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A straightforward and unhysterical guide to some of the more hair-raising nuclear, chemical and biological threats that have dominated the post-11 September world."

Frank Barnaby is a nuclear physicist by training. He worked at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston and was Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) from 1971 to 1981. He currently works for the Oxford Research Group on research into military technology, nuclear energy, and the terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. --This

text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I thought at only 256 pages this book would be a quick read. Instead, it has about 40-50 pages of interesting information followed by either total repetition of previous information or extremely simplistic musings. (I hate not finishing a book, but this one was like reading an incoherent text book,

A reference book which does not delve into the exhausting details of the WMD technology but presents in a clear and easy to read text all the essential information. Of course the title is somehow misleading, as the book is not a manual for nuclear bomb producers. The strong point of the book is that it is not necessary for someone to have a PhD in Physics, Biology or Chemistry in order to understand the working principles of WMD.

The possibility of home-made WMD's is front page news nowadays. But if you happen to notice your neighbor reading "How to Build a Nuclear Bomb: And Other Weapons of Mass Destruction (Nation Books), by Frank Barnaby, don't panic. Building WMD's is a lot easier said than done. Building an A-bomb requires a bunch of money, specialized scientists, technicians, uranium, a uranium enrichment facility, and a big, big room to assemble the thing. Can you build one from spare parts? Maybe. But A-bombs aren't like bikinis - you can't mix and match the precision parts. What about buying an A-bomb on the black market? Okay. But remember, most countries can't afford nuclear programs. Neither can individuals. Chemical weapons are a little bit cheaper than A-bombs. However, you still need a specialized chemist, a production facility, and a stockpile of exotic chemicals. And even if you do concoct a little poison gas, it's a tricky business deploying the stuff without killing yourself in the process. The problem is that when gas is released into the air, it typically goes where it goes - not where you want it to go. Anybody who has ever sat around a campfire knows that. Wherever you're sitting, that's where the smoke goes, right? And if that smoke is poison gas, Hasta la vista baby! Biological weapons are probably the cheapest of the three. But, again, you'll need specialized equipment and a suitable laboratory. Additionally, you have to know something about microbiology. Yikes! Then you have to decide what germ you want to weaponize and who'll sell it to you. Plague? Ebola? Anthrax? Smallpox? They're all horrific killers, but they're hard to acquire. Even if you could get your grimy mitts on one of them, keeping the little bugger alive is easier said than done. Too hot - they die. Too cold - they die. Make the slightest mistake - you die. And like gas, germs don't behave the way you want them to. Most likely they'll blow right back into your face. Oops! The bottom line is that WMD's are too expensive to buy, too difficult to make

and too dangerous to handle. So don't worry about your neighbor. He's probably just reading this book to mess with your head. Speaking of weird neighbors, check out my comments on *The Radioactive Boy Scout: The Frightening True Story of a Whiz Kid and His Homemade Nuclear Reactor*. Now there's a neighbor you have to worry about. This book is an excellent primer on WMD's and I highly recommend it.

A good place to start, and a nice complement to Denton Moody et al's more detailed information in *Nuclear Forensic Analysis* (2015).

perfect

Only a twisted prankster or a deluded madperson would publish a book on how to build a nuclear weapon. The author of this book however does not fit any of these two categories, and despite the title of this book, he has written a book that covers the issues and horrifying prospects behind chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. The title therefore is somewhat misleading, and one should not expect to find detailed explanations on how to construct a nuclear bomb. Even a terrorist group who was interested or had the knowledge on how to do this would not share this knowledge, preferring instead to keep it to itself. The book was first targeted to a British audience, but in this new edition one finds a new preface that is directed to readers in the United States. This preface was written after the immoral and illegal invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003. and the author makes a clear and skeptical allusion to the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He is concerned with any kind of nuclear development in places like North Korea and Iran, and gives some evidence and insight into the status of their nuclear programs. In any case the author's purpose in writing the book is in his words to "contribute to informed debate" by giving some details on how weapons of mass destruction can be developed and then used. If the actual building of a nuclear bomb is very difficult, even with weapons grade material available, then perhaps the goal of anti-terrorist planning should be more in the area of chemical and biological weapons, and in strict monitoring of the location of nuclear weapons that are already built. A terrorist group interested in using nuclear weapons in their attacks on civilian populations would find it easier to steal a nuclear weapon than to develop, or perhaps purchase one from a "rogue" state that is sympathetic with their grievances. The author does not give a general definition of what he considers "terrorism" to be, but a good definition that encapsulates the intent of terrorists would be: "Terrorism is the deliberate act of killing civilians for the purpose of bringing about a particular end or goal, political or

otherwise". The key part of this definition is in the real intent of killing civilians, rather than them being merely inadvertently killed when in the way of a military target. Thus the attacks on the World Trade Center were clearly terrorism, while the attack on the Pentagon was not, since the latter targeted a military installation. Palestinian suicide attacks against Israeli citizens are also acts of terrorism, as was the purposeful killing of Palestinians when their country was taken over by Zionist forces in 1949. The firebombing of Tokyo and Dresden by the Allies in World War II was also clearly a terrorist act and the nuclear attacks by the United States against Hiroshima and Nagasaki were without doubt acts of terrorism if one accepts the above definition. Thus individuals from many walks of life and political ideologies practice terrorism, both with primitive weapons and more sophisticated and deadly ones. Although the author does not state it explicitly, to date only the government of the United States has practiced nuclear terrorism, but the author asks the reader to consider whether the threat of nuclear terrorism by other groups or "rogue states" is a real one or one that has been exaggerated. To inflate the threat of terrorism to bring about a particular end or goal, political or otherwise, is a dastardly act, but the possibility of this occurring must be considered alongside the real threat of terrorism. We must be able to distinguish a real threat from an exaggerated one, in order to stay focused on genuine dangers and not those that are hyped up by a particular political party or governmental agency (a good example being the current regime in Washington). This is another good reason for reading this book, because it allows a more objective assessment of the effects of weapons of mass destruction, the degree of difficulty in their development, and the likelihood of their use by groups or countries. The author is skeptical of the chances of ridding the world of nuclear weapons, given the ability of countries that have them to obtain "dominant positions" in their regions. Most importantly, he addresses the ability of democratic societies to counter international terrorism without becoming an authoritarian regime in the process. He quotes a study that indicates that the likelihood of finding a terrorist group in a democratic society is 3.5 times the likelihood of finding one in an authoritarian regime. He does not elaborate on how these odds were calculated unfortunately. Anyone with a strong physics background has no doubt amused herself or himself at one time or another on just how they would build a nuclear bomb, if they were not currently working in nuclear weapons projects. It is natural to have such a curiosity, and this reviewer has been involved in many such conversations over lunch or in front of campfires. Without divulging classified knowledge, the author gives a brief overview of the physics and technology behind nuclear weapons in the book. The physicist reader will definitely find this part of the book interesting, even though the physics is kept at a very low level, in order to allow the book to appeal to a wider audience.

I didn't really like the class that I associate with this book. I only skimmed it enough to complete the reading journal that I needed for the book. So it served its purpose.

GIVE THIS TO YOUR KIDS, IT IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK, THEY WILL LIKE IT

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