

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Nuclear Terrorism: Local effects, global consequences**

SAGA Foundation

Nuclear terrorism remains the most serious existential threat to our national security in the world today, yet the issue has fallen off our national priority list. Bipartisan consensus on the seriousness of the threat has not been matched by an energetic national response to curtailing the chances of a catastrophic terrorist nuclear attack.

While the explosive effects of nuclear weapons are well understood, the economic and psychological effects of such an attack on modern society and upon our large but also fragile economies are poorly understood. A terrorist nuclear attack would set off an economic chain reaction that could freeze the U.S. economy overnight and lead to global depression. It would plunge the nation into war because of the pressure for some sort of retaliatory action, and could lead to permanent erosion of our civil liberties.

The damage done by nuclear terrorism would flow as much from the actions of government to prevent a follow-on attack as from the terrorist detonation itself. Steps such as freezing all imports or halting all freight traffic would likely be ordered by a president in addressing the threat of further attack but such steps would have devastating consequences of their own.

Detailed city-by-city studies of nuclear blast effects must now be matched by detailed step-by-step war-gaming of the decision-making that would likely follow a terrorist nuclear attack.

Nuclear terrorism has dropped from view as an issue in part because some believe such an attack to be highly unlikely. While it is true that the obstacles to a terror group obtaining nuclear capability and unleashing it are many, it is also true that the most likely *nuclear* scenario we are liable to face would be the terrorist scenario.

Nuclear terrorism represents a comprehensive threat that requires a comprehensive response, ranging from energized efforts to reduce, eliminate or, at the very least, secure all nuclear weapons material worldwide, to the skillful use of our national power, whether military, economic or diplomatic.

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