



The Ultimate Terrorists

By Jessica Stern

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As bad as they are, why aren't terrorists worse? With biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons at hand, they easily could be. And, as this chilling book suggests, they soon may well be. A former member of the National Security Council staff, Jessica Stern guides us expertly through a post-Cold War world in which the threat of all-out nuclear war, devastating but highly unlikely, is being replaced by the less costly but much more imminent threat of terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction.

According to Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* depicts a not-very-distant future in which both independent and state-sponsored terrorism using weapons of mass destruction could actually occur. But Stern also holds out hope for new technologies that might combat this trend, and for legal and political remedies that would improve public safety without compromising basic constitutional rights.

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The Ultimate Terrorists By Jessica Stern Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In recent years, much has been made of the emerging post-Cold War threats posed by terrorist groups wielding devastating weapons. Stern, a former National Security Council staffer, explains with chilling lucidity why it is becoming more likely that those threats will materialize into a major terrorist incident featuring a weapon of mass destruction. Breaking her theory into numerous digestible parts, Stern begins by showing that terrorists themselves have changed. Whereas in the past they have been driven by political concerns (e.g., recognition of Palestinian national aspirations), terrorists now are motivated by a multitude of extremist causes, and some view terrorism not as a tactical tool but as an end in itself. The new terrorists are also better supplied and more highly educated than their precursors. Dangerous weapons?such as those previously owned by the former Soviet Union?are readily available on the black market. In addition, the Internet makes it easier for terrorists to recruit and communicate with comrades. In cool prose that never talks down to lay readers, Stern outlines the horrific effects of biological and chemical agents, making a thoroughly convincing case that a biochemical attack would be compounded by mass panic and a dangerous social breakdown. "Because they evoke such horror," Stern writes, "these weapons would seem to be ideal for terrorists, who seek to inspire fear in targeted populations." But even as Stern stokes fear, she also offers an extensive proposal for countering the new terrorism. Her proposals will not be for everyone but will surely provide substantial food for thought. (Mar.) FYI: Stern was portrayed by Nicole Kidman in the film *The Peacemaker*.

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From Library Journal

Stern, a former National Security Council staffer, reviews the current threat posed by terrorists possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMD)?nuclear, chemical, and biological?especially as directed against the United States. She discusses state-sponsored terrorism (Iraq), the risks of leftover materials from the former Soviet Union, and recommendations for combatting WMD terrorism, such as closer monitoring of domestic threats like political extremists and religious cults. In the post-Cold War world, the threat of terrorism is much greater than nuclear war, yet in Stern's opinion the United States is not sufficiently prepared to confront it. She hopes her policy suggestions will help reduce the likelihood and deadliness of terrorist acts. Geared to an informed audience, heavily footnoted, and with technical details of WMD components, this book is recommended for specialized collections on terrorism.?Gregor A. Preston, formerly with Univ. of California Lib., Davis

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Review

[Stern's] research is breathtakingly thorough, and the prose, so often describing complex technological detail, surprisingly lucid. The era of 'the ultimate terrorists', implying nuclear, biological or chemical weapons may not yet have dawned in any real sense, but the potential and the danger, as this book illustrates, are all too obvious...[Stern] has written a valuable book that should serve as a timely warning about a potentially dreadful future. (Sean O'Callaghan *The Times*)

[A] thought provoking book...Stern's background in the security community, where she ran the Nuclear Smuggling Interagency Group, allows her to write with firsthand knowledge about the disturbing consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union. Having directed the group for Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasian affairs, Stern places a particular emphasis on how volatile that region has become...Terrorism may always exist, but Stern's recommendation that we find ways to minimize its ability to cause horror, panic,

and alarm might be the ultimate weapon against it. (Charles Davis *Boston Book Review*)

The ominous-sounding title *The Ultimate Terrorists* can't outweigh the balanced and blessedly concise arguments that Jessica Stern presents in the book itself. The threat of terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD) has given rise to a panic industry; Stern has emerged as one of the few influential voices of calm. (Tim Cavanaugh *Salon.com*)

Jessica Stern examines why today's breed of clandestine bomb-throwers are actually more likely to use germs, chemicals or a bit of unguarded enriched uranium from Russia to make their point...[Terrorist] incidents have multiplied more than fivefold since the 1970s, and on average each terrorist now kills twice as many people. Where their old-fashioned counterparts wanted political concessions, many crazies not just want to kill people, or sow dread. There are few better ways to do the job than with germs and poisons. Stern shows how these, along with a simple nuclear device that scatters poisonous isotopes about, are ideal terrorist tools, to prey on humanity's fears. (Debora MacKenzie *New Scientist*)

In cool prose that never talks down to lay readers, Stern outlines the horrific effects of biological and chemical agents, making a thoroughly convincing case that a biochemical attack would be compounded by mass panic and a dangerous social breakdown... But even as Stern stokes fear, she also offers an extensive proposal for countering the new terrorism. Her proposals will not be for everyone but will surely provide substantial food for thought. (*Publishers Weekly*)

This important volume is powerfully suggestive of what in all probability will be a potent and dangerous force in the international arena during the coming century--terrorists willing and able to employ weapons of mass destruction in pursuit of their political and ideological aims...Stern has opened a door into a complex realm of politics and policy that defies easy categorization and crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries. Explaining the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction necessarily involves a substantial degree of scientific and technical expertise, and the author wields this knowledge effectively. (David W. Thornton *American Diplomacy*)

[*The Ultimate Terrorists*] combine[s] serious scholarship with practical wisdom. (Gideon Rose *Foreign Affairs*)

This slender volume is largely free of hype, and is characterized by fair reporting and sober analysis...It presents an immensely valuable snapshot of where the world stands *vis-à-vis* the threat, and how the worst possibilities might be minimized. (Leonard A. Cole *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*)

This brief but surprisingly thorough book deals with the means, modes, and the likely terrorist actors in several situations...This is a serious book by an author with an intimate knowledge of her subject. Though not a lofty academic treatise, this important policy text gives the reader a reasoned, careful, and thoughtful glimpse into a dark corner of science, politics, and war. Strongly recommended for all libraries. (E. Lewis *Choice*)

[Stern's] expertise should convince policymakers of [her proposals'] wisdom, as well as raise public awareness of the danger. (Gilbert Taylor *Booklist*)

Jessica Stern's study of terrorism is the most detailed and reliable at this time. It is particularly good with regard to the technical issues involved in biological and chemical terrorism. She acquired unrivaled knowledge, both in a responsible position in government and as an independent scholar. Her book should be widely read and is highly recommended. (Walter Laqueur,)

The Ultimate Terrorists is a timely book on a vitally important subject. Jessica Stern has done a thorough job of research and presents her arguments with clarity and force. This book should be a wake up call for Americans. (William J. Perry, former Secretary of Defense)

Jessica Stern sounds an important alarm in responsible fashion. A good read as well as good scholarship. I hope her alarm is widely heard. (Anthony Lake, former National Security Advisor)

What if the terrorists who bombed the World Trade Center had used a nuclear device or anthrax? Jessica Stern's account reads like a thriller, but is deadly serious. Fortunately, she also provides good advice. (Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Dean, Kennedy School of Government)

Will terrorists soon obtain weapons of mass destruction--nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons? If they do acquire them, will terrorists actually use them for blackmail, retribution, or simply pure destruction? These are the questions that Jessica Stern addresses in this important, well-written, and sensible volume. *The Ultimate Terrorists* is an excellent introduction to a potentially frightful future. (Robert J. Art, Brandeis University)

Jessica Stern is part of America's security community, and tracking down nuclear smugglers is her specialty. It gives an edge to *The Ultimate Terrorists*, her analysis of modern terrorism that trawls through the whole horror show, from bioweapons to bombs. (*New Scientist* 2000-12-02)

A balanced and blessedly concise examination of the potential for terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. Written by a former fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations, this book was an early warning of the new threat. (*Salon.com* 2001-09-28)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Vincent Peck:

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