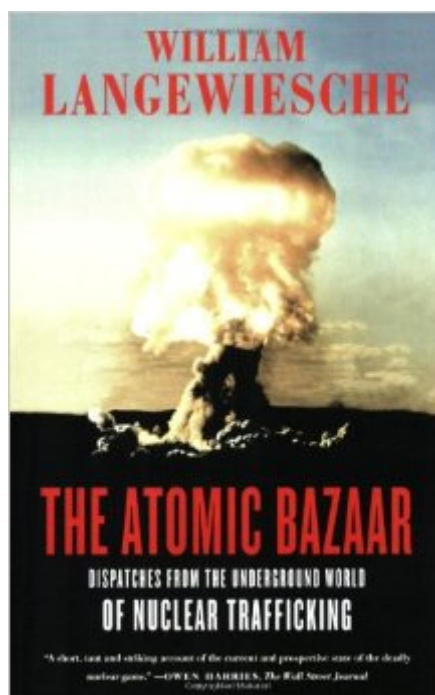


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The Atomic Bazaar: Dispatches From The Underground World Of Nuclear Trafficking



Synopsis

In his shocking and revelatory new work, the celebrated journalist William Langewiesche investigates the burgeoning global threat of nuclear weapons production. *The Atomic Bazaar* is the story of the inexorable drift of nuclear weapons technology from the hands of the rich into the hands of the poor. As more unstable and undeveloped nations find ways of acquiring the ultimate arms, the stakes of state-sponsored nuclear activity have soared to frightening heights. Even more disturbing is the likelihood of such weapons being manufactured and deployed by guerrilla non-state terrorists. Langewiesche also recounts the recent history of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the scientist at the forefront of nuclear development and trade in the Middle East who masterminded the theft and sale of centrifuge designs that helped to build Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, and who single-handedly peddled nuclear plans to North Korea, Iran, and other potentially hostile countries. He then examines in dramatic and tangible detail the chances for nuclear terrorism. From Hiroshima to the present day, Langewiesche describes a reality of urgent consequence to us all. This searing, provocative, and timely report is a triumph of investigative journalism, and a masterful laying out of the most critical political problem the world now faces.

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Customer Reviews

In the post 9-11 world there has been much debate about the possibility of a nuclear terrorist attack; either dirty or conventional. Given the discussions, and the accusations about other nations' capabilities, I think it is incumbent upon us all to learn as much as we can about the realities of the

situation and how nuclear material is dealt with. This book begins with a look at how a nuclear bomb could (and almost would have to be) made and how it could be detonated. It discusses, in detail, the similarities and differences between plutonium and highly enriched uranium. It further details what the extent of damage would be, as well as likely repercussions. The author then moves into the area of security of possible fuels, and gives a detailed look at how difficult it would be for a terrorist group to obtain the needed material. Finally, the book finishes with a detailed look at A.Q. Khan, and the role Pakistan has had in disseminating information to other third world nations. It also discusses the politics of the nuclear underground and how this might affect the world. The book is well written, contains much valuable information, and paints a brighter picture than I would have imagined possible. It is, however, frightening to think of who has these weapons and how they might be used.

The nuclear doomsday thriller was in vogue during the 1980's (see "Warday" -- 1984 and "The Fifth Horseman" -- 1980). Now in a post 9-11 world, nuclear destruction has made a comeback in TV (see "24") and in literature with "The Atomic Bazaar." Written in a documentary fashion, Mr. Langewiesche focuses upon how easy it would be for a terrorist to obtain the materials for a nuclear bomb (starting in Russia). Then the book tells the true story of A. Q. Khan who offered "nukes to go" to the rogue nations of the world. Easily read in one evening, it will leave you paranoid for our future.

Langewiesche is a great reporter and a good writer. Like Sebastian Junger, he writes coldly, directly and at times viciously about the realities of an armageddon that could be coming to your (our) front door very soon. The first half of the book are broad strokes on how that armageddon could manifest itself via a terror network. The second half of the book concerns AQ Khan, the Pakistani proliferationist who wittingly has made the first half of the book 'do-able'. Unlike Junger, Langewiesche lacks the great writer's ability to weave a narrative; the book feels disjointed, a bit tossed together at times. No matter. The content is critical for understanding the age we live in and the realities we may someday face.

Quick read - I read it in 3 hours. Langewiesche's prose is concise and compelling. Langewiesche starts off by describing how a simple mashing together of 2 blocks of highly enriched uranium could cause a blast. Then he describes what it would look like and feel like if you were there. The next part of the book explains how difficult it would be for a stateless terrorist to obtain highly enriched uranium (HEU) and make a bomb out of it. It is nearly impossible. Uranium is easy to get but it takes a whole lot of technology to make the 90% HEU necessary for a weapon. The rest of the book is an

expose' of the Pakistan's notorious, greedy, egocentric, megalomaniacal A.Q. Khan and how he stole technology from an unsuspecting Dutch engineering firm to develop Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and how he sold the technology to anyone with money. The last part of the book is an unflinching excoriation of Musharrif and the rest of Pakistan's ruling elite. The technology is out there; any state with the money will get a bomb - the genie is out of the bottle - Saudi Arabia, Syria, Brazil, Venezuela, Iran; you can't stop it. It is foolish to try. I disagree with the other review of this book - The author's conclusion is that a terrorist could not obtain a nuke. (I also heard him say the same on NPR). He assures us that detonations and nuclear exchanges will likely take place but probably between backward countries such as India and Pakistan. He reassures us that if a state handed over a nuke to a terrorist to use on us, they would be accountable, and nobody has as many nukes as we do.

Langewiesche is one of the world's most gifted writers. I'd say gifted investigative writers/reporters... but that sounds limiting.. And he has no limits to his storytelling... or, apparently, his access to some very smart, informed, and sleezy characters. His writing style never fails to simultaneously inform and entertain. The tech-heavy parts are made highly digestible for the lay person. The personalities shine through as tho they are in the room. This look into the world of bomb making is a wake up call. Hopefully it's not too late. Should be required reading by everyone in government and the military. Read all of his books. The worst one is still a 9.9 !

I read this book with some reservation since I was being told to read it. In the end, it was a good book. It shows some serious naive attitudes towards security of secrets for such potentially dangerous technology. It follows the Pakistani trail as he enables Pakistan to build a nuclear bomb. In retrospect, it was somewhat demoralizing but never-the-less, a good read. I learned a lot from it.

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