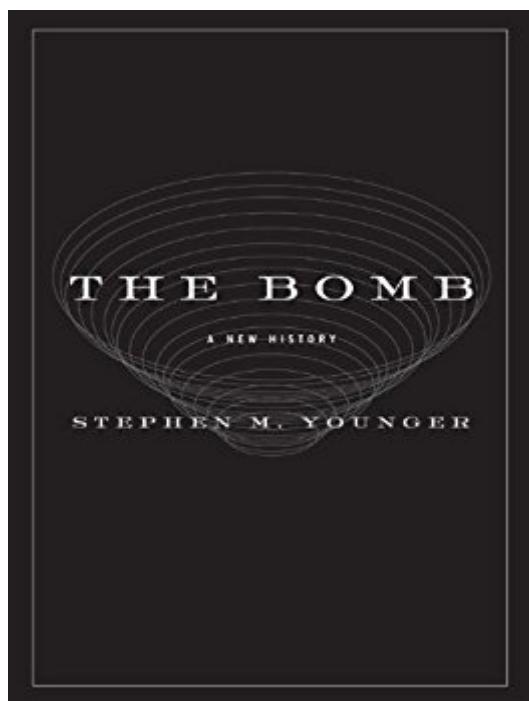


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The Bomb: A New History



Synopsis

Younger has provided an insightful guide, especially for the general reader, into today's array of nuclear powers and their capabilities. "James Schlesinger, former Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy, former Director of Central Intelligence" In The Bomb, Stephen Younger, former Los Alamos weapons designer and author of Endangered Species, provides a new history of the making of nuclear policy and the creation of the most terrible weapons humankind has ever possessed. In an era when rogue nations like North Korea and Iran strive to create their own precarious weapons programs, Younger's The Bomb provides much-needed background and insight for students, policy makers, and readers who wish to better understand the important issues involving nuclear weapons and national security.

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Customer Reviews

Stephen Younger's book on the bomb is a very good primer on nuclear weapons, but somewhat limited by its length. Mr. Younger who is a veteran weapons designer and defense official begins with a succinct history of nuclear weapons and then goes on to review the major weapons and

delivery systems in the United States and other countries. He talks about the deterrence triad in the United States; bombers, ballistic missiles and especially submarine-based nuclear missiles that can pack the biggest punch most efficiently. Also included are short discussions of developing and already developed arsenals in other countries including Russia, China, Southeast Asia, France and Britain. Younger writes about the modern weaponization of Russia which is in progress and discusses the status of development in other countries. The discussion also includes a general overview of nuclear weapons effects including thermal, blast, radiation and electromagnetic effects and a chapter on 'soft' and 'hard' targets and their targeting. Younger contends that a weapon of about 10kT yield would be sufficient to destroy or seriously damage most major cities and installations in the world, except extremely hardened underground facilities. Compare this with the W series of warheads in the US arsenal, many of which pack an explosive force equivalent to several hundred kilotons of TNT. Younger also discusses nuclear proliferation and the problems inherent in terrorists constructing a bomb.

I feel ambivalent about this book. First, the good points. In a concise 220 pages (and a complete index), Younger, an eminently qualified commentator on issues of nuclear weapons, presents a somewhat technical overview and historical summary of nuclear warfare. He makes many salient points. For instance, this is one of the few nuclear histories that notes that Kennedy's "victory" over Khruschev in the Cuban crisis was actually a deal to trade the Cuban-deployed missiles for US Jupiter missiles in Turkey targeted on the USSR. In the popular American imagination (perpetuated by Kennedy after the fact), the self-congratulatory conclusion is that Kennedy forced Khruschev to unilaterally withdraw. Likewise, that Khruschev's installation of the Cuban missiles in the first place was a unilateral provocation. I was glad to see Younger correct these two misconceptions. (I recommend the 4-page summary of the Missile Crisis presented by Niall Ferguson in the epilogue to *The War of the World* which verifies this interpretation, and adds a few juicy details besides.) Younger addresses a broad spectrum of nuclear issues including delivery vehicles, missile defense, arms control, the nuclear laboratories (in which he was a principal), testing, stockpile stewardship, and nuclear international politics. Unfortunately, the book is excessively concise for its subject area. Its breadth of coverage is the book's Achilles Heel. Younger takes space to present only the barest of detail, and these topics are far too complex and important to be adequately addressed in the space available.

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