



Volume 3

Number 1 *International Journal of Nuclear Security*

12-18-2017

Book Review of "Right of Boom: The Aftermath of Nuclear Terrorism" by Benjamin E. Schwartz

Kyle Mangrum

University of Tennessee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/ijns>

Recommended Citation

Mangrum, Kyle (2017) "Book Review of "Right of Boom: The Aftermath of Nuclear Terrorism" by Benjamin E. Schwartz," *International Journal of Nuclear Security*: Vol. 3: No. 1, Article 16.
Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7290/ijns030116>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Nuclear Security by an authorized editor of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

Book Review

Right of Boom: The Aftermath of Nuclear Terrorism

Benjamin E. Schwartz

The Overlook Press, USA; First Edition, 2015, 276 pages
\$27.95, ISBN 13: 978-1-4683-0994-2

Reviewed by Kyle Mangrum

Benjamin E. Schwartz has held several different national security posts within the United States government, including with the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and Department of State. Such in-depth and inside knowledge into the workings of national security policy has given Schwartz unique insight into nuclear terrorism that is much-needed within the growing field.

Right of Boom: The Aftermath of Nuclear Terrorism, Schwartz's first book, presents a hypothetical scenario in which Washington D.C. is attacked via an IND (Improvised Nuclear Device) by an unknown terrorist organization. The book explores the consequences of such an attack on both U.S. domestic and foreign policy as well as the attack's impact on the rest of the world. To do so, Schwartz examines possible outcomes by considering how past interactions and crises involving nuclear weapons have been handled. Thus, the book essentially serves as a history of nuclear security interspersed with extrapolations into the future of nuclear terrorism, based on historical precedents both in nuclear weapons and terrorism.

Right of Boom is organized into eight sections, each addressing a separate aspect of nuclear terrorism while continuing to follow the proposed scenario of an attack on D.C. The introductory chapter details the hypothetical explosion, while the fictionalized lead-in to the first chapter is set two days "right of boom"—Schwartz's term for the aftermath of the explosion. Beginning each chapter, Schwartz details the logistical issues that the U.S. would face, and the decisions that would have to be made, in dealing with the effects of the attack. Among such problems are: determining exactly how the perpetrators acquired nuclear weapons, how to pinpoint their location and retaliate, etc. Schwartz then proceeds to analyze historical interactions between states in terms of both nuclear deterrence and terrorism; he then applies this historical analysis to extrapolate what could consequently occur across both fields, especially once the field of nuclear terrorism is fully realized. Schwartz believes that if an IND attack occurred, all rules and norms in international politics concerning warfare, terrorism, nuclear weapons, or deterrence would suddenly be rendered useless—because an IND's use would be so unprecedented that all prior measures would be archaic in the post-IND world.

Schwartz clearly intended for *Right of Boom* to provide cutting-edge insight into the future of nuclear terrorism and its potential effects on U.S. foreign policy and international politics. However, the book effectively serves as more of a history of both nuclear weapons/deterrence and of terrorism, without discussing them concurrently enough for them to actually overlap. As such, Schwartz discusses both topics separately but does not fully or perhaps satisfactorily interweave them. The potential scenario of an IND being detonated by an unknown terrorist organization reads intriguingly, but the conceptualizations

of how the attack would shape policy and impact interactions between states could be further developed. Still, the book functions well as a historical look at both nuclear security and terrorism, and the hypothetical scenario raises compelling questions regarding the immense difficulty and ethics of retaliating to an IND attack, even if they are questions which Schwartz may ultimately not be able to answer.

Right of Boom is an accessible read, as Schwartz restricts jargon of both fields to a minimum. The book is enjoyable and engaging, but does suffer from a lack of direction and does not fully deliver in satisfactorily exploring “the aftermath of nuclear terrorism.” Still and all, Schwartz knows his material and has performed extensive research; incorporated sources are credible and are cited or elaborated on in the endnotes. *Right of Boom: The Aftermath of Nuclear Terrorism* is a generally thought-provoking book that may well prove an absorbing read for those sharing Schwartz’s interest in nuclear security and terrorism.