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Nuclear terror attack on NY would kill more than 250,000:rpt

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A terror attack on New York using a Hiroshima-sized nuclear bomb would kill more than a quarter of a million people and leave hundreds of thousands sick, suggests a computer estimate published in today's British Medical Journal (BMJ).

The calculation, made by three physicians who are members of doctors' groups campaigning against nuclear weapons, used computer models created by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Defence Threat Reduction Agency.

The scenario is based on a bomb capable of yielding an equivalent TNT blast of 12.5 kilotonnes, smuggled into the port of New York aboard a shipping container and detonated at ground level.

"The blast and thermal effects of such an explosion would kill 52,000 people immediately, and direct radiation would cause 44,000 cases of radiation sickness, of which 10,000 would be fatal," the authors say.

"Radiation from fallout would kill another 200,000 people and cause several hundred thousand additional cases of radiation sickness."

⇐ The authorities' ability to aid survivors "would be very limited," they warn.

"About 1,000 hospital beds would be destroyed by the blast and 8,700 more would be in areas with radiation exposures high enough to cause radiation sickness. The remaining local medical facilities would quickly be overwhelmed, and even with advance preparation outside help would be delayed."

The authors are Ira Helfland, head of emergency medicine at Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Northampton, Massachusetts; Lachlan Forrow, a professor at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre, Harvard Medical School, Boston; and Jaya Tiwari, research director for Physicians for Social Responsibility, headquartered in Washington.

The three, who are members of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and Physicians for Social Responsibility, argue that the only effective to prevent nuclear terrorism is to abolish nuclear weapons.

The BMJ is the weekly organ of the British Medical Association (BMA).

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