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Tip on Nuclear Attack Risk Was Kept From New Yorkers

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By ROBERT D. McFADDEN [The New York Times](#)

A month after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, senior Bush administration officials received an intelligence report that terrorists had obtained a 10-kiloton nuclear weapon from the Russian arsenal and were planning to smuggle it into New York City, a government official said yesterday.

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Energy Department's Nuclear Emergency Search Team, a top secret group based in Nevada.

The director of central intelligence, George Tenet, was among those briefed on the report in October, according to the official who confirmed the Time report. That official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, noted that top intelligence officials normally field dozens of warnings and threats daily, most of them false.

"During the immediate post-9/11 period and continuing on today there are large numbers of reports," the official said. "This was one of them, and it was dealt with appropriately."

At least one former New York official, Bernard B. Kerik, who was the police commissioner at the time, questioned the decision to withhold the information from New York officials.

"If they had information like that, that's appalling," Mr. Kerik said. "I was never told. I was concerned we weren't being fed all the information."

Mr. Giuliani, who was quoted by Time as saying he too was never told, had no comment, his spokeswoman, Sunny Mindel, said last night. Even as the report was being secretly investigated last fall, on Oct. 29 Mr. Giuliani called for new laws that would significantly increase the amount of information shared between federal and local law enforcement agencies. And his concerns were

Confirming an account in today's issue of Time magazine, the official said the highly classified intelligence report had come from a source of questionable reliability and had circulated among a relatively few top officials who concluded, after weeks of investigation, that it was false.

The report was kept a tight secret former Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, the New York Police Department and even senior Federal Bureau of Investigation officials were not told so as not to panic New Yorkers, Time said. It said a 10- kiloton bomb detonated in Lower Manhattan would kill 100,000 people, sicken 700,000 with radiation and flatten everything within a half-mile.

While the October tip was ultimately found to have no basis, Time said, it generated a few harrowing weeks of terrifying uncertainty in the small circle of agencies that knew about it the White House Counterterrorism Security Group, part of the National Security Council, and the

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echoed that day by governors and other officials at a Congressional hearing on terrorism.

Asked last night about the government's decision not to inform New York officials of the intelligence report, Taylor Gross, a White House spokesman, said: "The president's No. 1 priority is making sure we protect the homeland and prevent any attacks from happening in the first place. If there is a credible and specific threat, we will coordinate closely with state and local officials to meet that objective."

The Bush administration has been criticized on several occasions in recent months for warning of potential terrorist attacks without providing specific information about the possible nature or locales of such attacks.

Time said the source of the report had been "a mercurial agent code- named dragonfire." While his reliability was questioned immediately, the suggestion that the bomb had come from Russia's arsenal dovetailed with intelligence reports that such weapons may have been stolen from the Russians in the 1990's specifically a report from a Russian general who said his forces were missing a 10-kiloton device, Time said. Russia has insisted that none of its nuclear weapons is missing.

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