

A Nuclear Nightmare

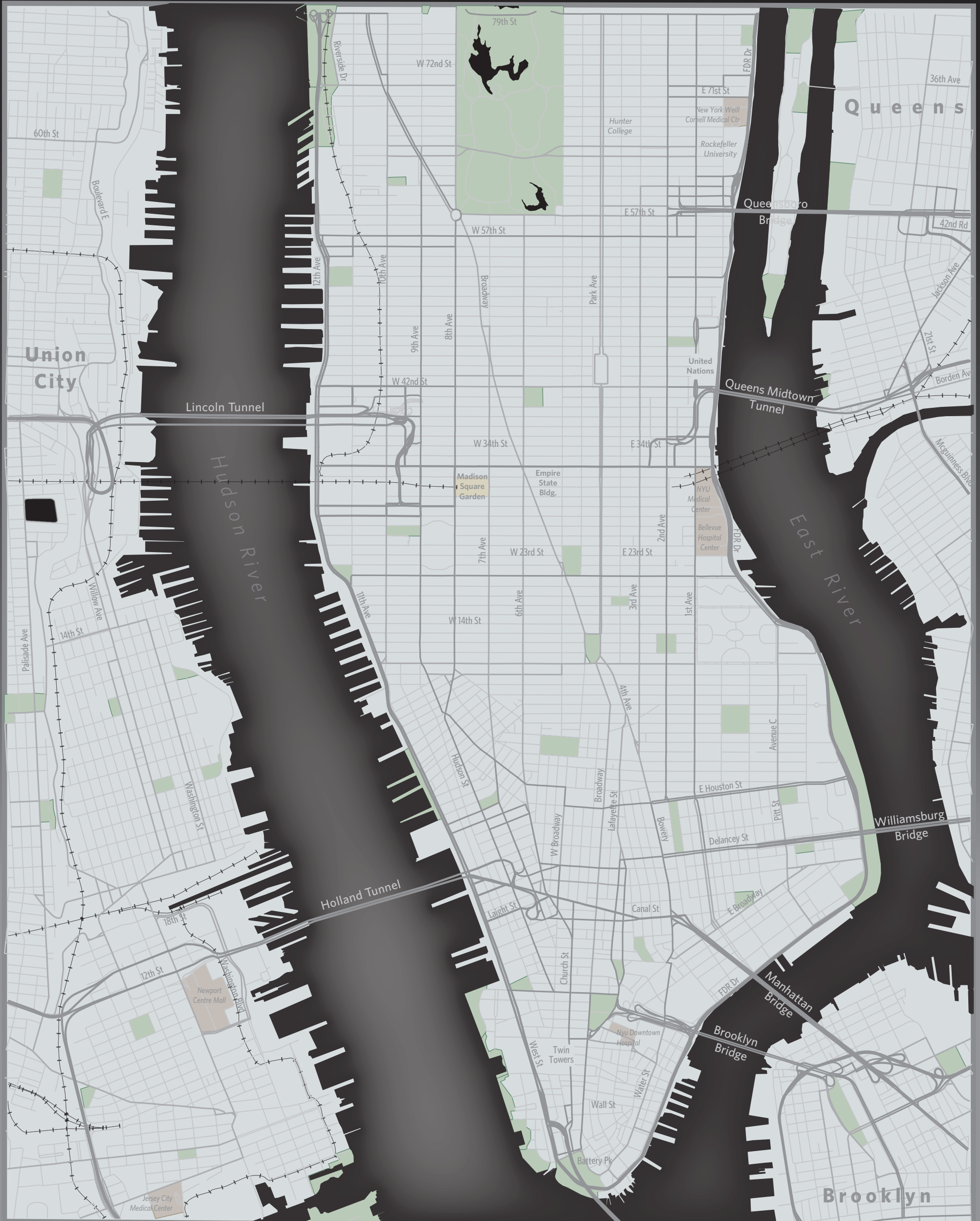
Only a month after the attacks of September 11, 2001, American intelligence officials received a report that terrorists had acquired a 10-kiloton nuclear weapon and were planning to explode it in Manhattan. Although the report turned out to be a false alarm, no terrorism scenario has sparked as much fear as a nuclear attack on a major U.S. city. This map depicts the effects of three possible weapons: 10-kiloton, 150-kiloton, and 550-kiloton bombs, detonated at Grand Central Station. These scenarios also assume that the bomb is at ground level. Ground-level explosions (groundbursts) produce fewer immediate casualties but much more fallout (and fallout casualties). If terrorists were able to get a weapon aboard a small plane and detonate it at an altitude of several thousand feet (and airburst), the immediate casualties would be much greater but the fallout would be reduced. These maps do not show fallout damage.

Click to display map

10-kiloton weapon: If a terrorist group were able to collect the materials and expertise necessary to build a nuclear weapon, it would likely be in the 10-Kt range. This is similar in destructive power to the Hiroshima bomb. By the standards of modern nuclear arsenals, this would be a very small weapon.

150-kiloton weapon: Most analysts believe that the most likely way terrorists would acquire a weapon would be through theft of an existing arsenal. A 150-Kt weapon is a typical size for small nuclear arsenals, such as Pakistan's. In a modern arsenal, this would be a small weapon.

550-kiloton weapon: This size of weapon would be commonly found in arsenals such as Russia's. Such a weapon would be harder to conceal and transport, but would still fit inside a small rental truck. In a modern arsenal, this would be a medium-sized weapon.



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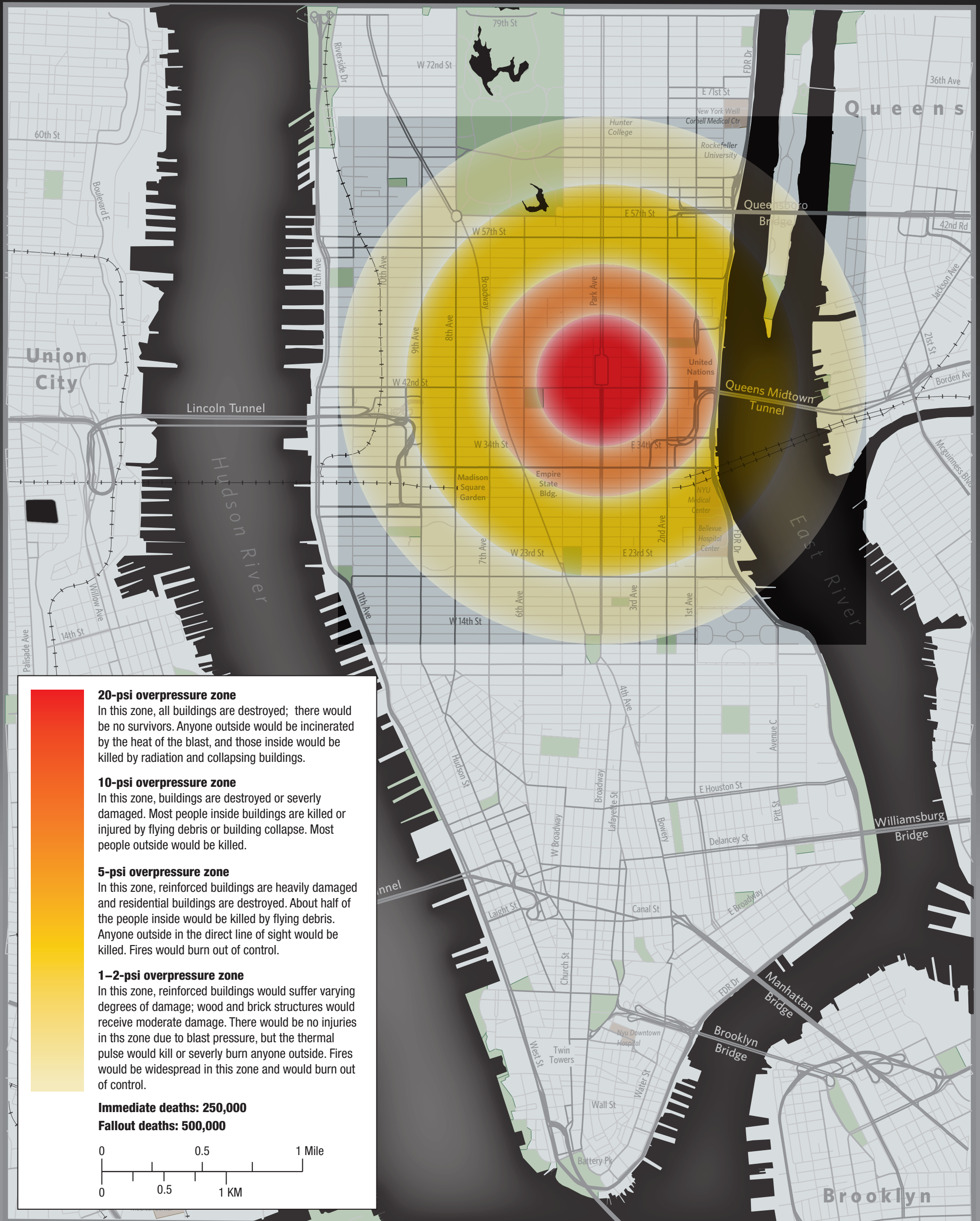
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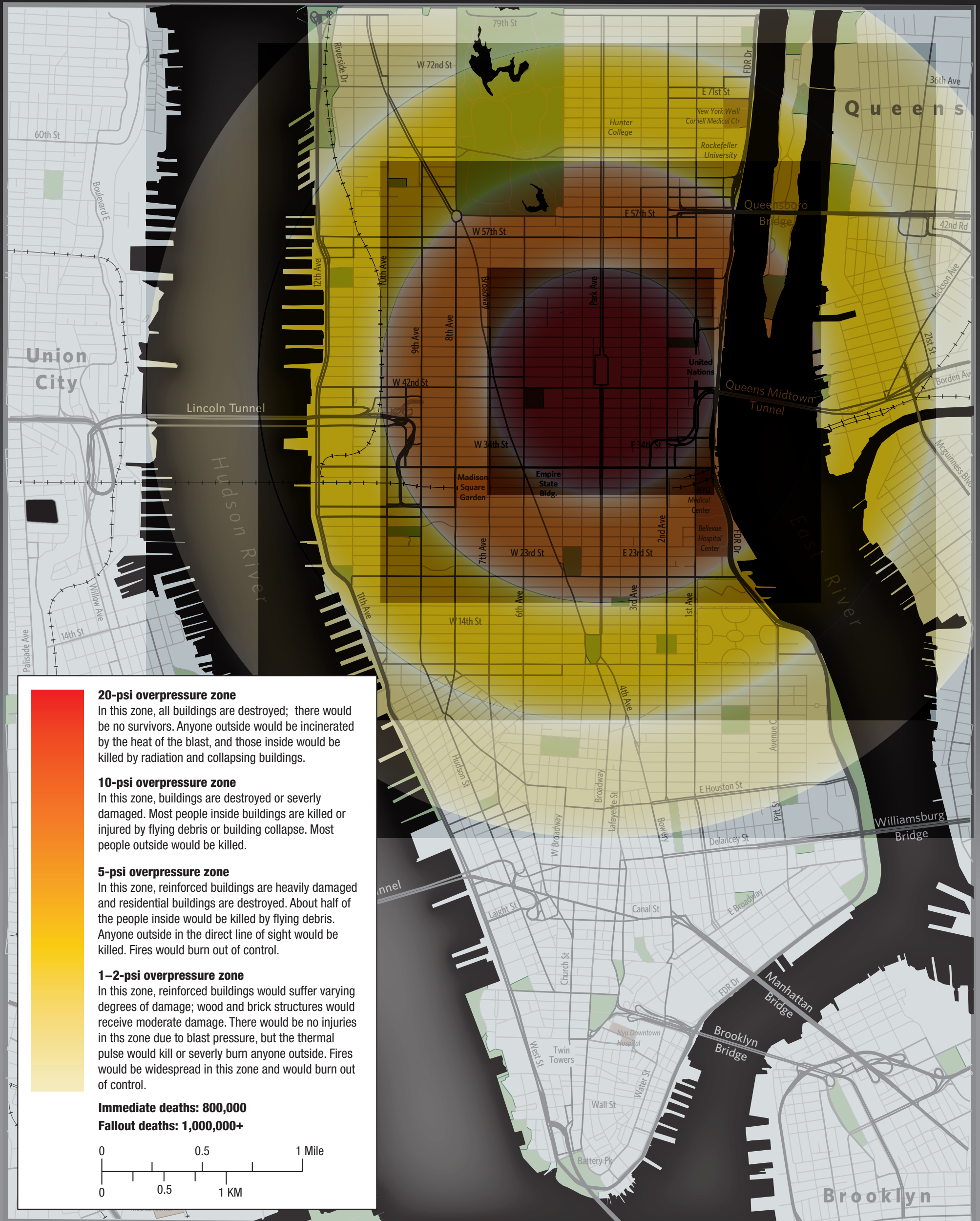
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