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Germ: Biological Weapons and America's Secret

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undefined and unknown emerging threat be acceptable to the rest of the world?

Rockets' Red Glare has my wholehearted recommendation. However, it must now be read with an active consideration of, and sober reflection on, the impact of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath, the war on terrorism.

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Miller, Judith, Stephen Engelberg, and William Broad. *Germs: Biological Weapons and America's Secret War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001. 382pp. \$27

In 1988, only two years before the Soviet empire fell, secret scientific efforts were still turning germs into weapons and creating entirely new germs. In Koltsovo, a hidden Siberian city, scientist Nikolai Ustinov died from an accident while working with the Marburg virus, designed to bleed victims to death. With clinical detachment, he documented his own decline in a journal with blood-spotted pages. His colleagues found that the virus had mutated while killing him. Their response was consistent with their careers—they buried the scientist in a zinc-lined coffin and turned the “new” virus into a weapon, naming it “Variant U,” in tribute to Ustinov.

That story, with its multiple layers of horror, shows why reality is often more remarkable than the best novel. It also has important parallels to current concerns over states that manufacture and prepare living weapons for deployment. Iraq again made the news when in March 2002 Iraqi civil engineer Adnan Sayeed, along with another defector, smuggled

out evidence of Iraq's ongoing germ weapons program. Then there is Iran. This book reprises the authors' earlier reporting on wide-ranging, well-funded Iranian efforts to buy up talent from destitute Soviet weapons labs.

This is an important book on current affairs, crafted in an accessible style by three professionals of the *New York Times* who have excellent contacts in the federal government. William Broad is a science writer who has shared two Pulitzer Prizes. Stephen Engelberg has long reported on national security issues. Judith Miller has done groundbreaking investigations on anti-American terrorists. Although their report is not what might have been done by a blue-ribbon scientific panel, it is reaching a much larger audience. Moreover, it deserves favorable notice as an original work created well before the 2001 anthrax attacks.

Germs is not specifically about biological threats posed by small terrorist groups; it focuses on state producers of “super germs”—disease-generating organisms to be used in military weapons systems. It discusses the tension between developing biological weapons and devising programs to counter them. Any argument as to whether a weapons program is for offense or defense (as Winston Churchill showed in a humorous “disarmament fable” in October 1928) is more about intentions and regimes and fears than about actual weapons. That leaves challenging ambiguities. Parts of this book appear to be directed against any U.S. government germ work that goes beyond research and into development. Its wider appeal is that all countries be kept within bounds by treaty law.

Several small flaws are apparent. One paragraph flatly dismisses the value of all U.S. Senate hearings as mere stage

productions. This idea is silly and elitist, and is disproved by the authors themselves. In several other passages they discuss significant congressional work, including a hearing by former senator John Glenn, who chaired the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee.

There is no criticism of President Bill Clinton in this book. The authors repeatedly show him in a good light as prodding the lethargic toward caring about this new and very dangerous problem. The authors do admit to lapses in his administration, but they attribute them to others—for example, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, who in a press conference hoisted a five-pound bag of sugar to make a point about how anthrax could kill half the District of Columbia. Some think he exaggerated (and the authors agree), yet when reporting the argument Miller, Engelberg, and Broad treat Cohen unfairly by mixing references to Washington, D.C., and its far larger metro area. Also, just how much should one care if Cohen's five-pound bag of sugar was light by two pounds, or ten, when the next chapter states that the Soviets were making 4,500 metric tons of anthrax every year?

The efforts by many U.S. officials and scientists were important responses to a reality well stated in this work: the U.S. public health system must be better integrated into its national defenses—a need recognized early on in Cold War civil defense. Although civil defense later declined, by 1989 the need, if not apparent, was nonetheless great. Iraq was busy brewing veritable swimming pools full of anthrax, tularemia, glanders, bubonic plague, as well as smaller amounts of other agents. The Soviets' formidable *biopreparat* program would remain dangerous, even in decline, and even now

Russia cannot be fully trusted on biowar issues, say the authors.

Information on biological agent production came to light throughout the 1990s. Weapons of mass destruction are now a prime reason why the hottest topic in Washington is “unfinished business” with Baghdad. But with that challenge comes another. Whatever the world community may do to stop Iraq's weapon development program, Iran will still remain, wealthier than its neighbor and equally ready to kill people, as proven by three decades of transnational terrorism and ongoing development of a range of weapons of mass destruction. North Korea is still an odd blend of militarism, weapons of mass destruction, and occasional fatuity. There must be a strategy that deals with more than Saddam Hussein alone.

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Duncan, Francis. *Rickover: The Struggle for Excellence*. Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2001. 416pp. \$37.50

Dr. Francis Duncan served as the official historian to the Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Energy and worked in Admiral Hyman G. Rickover's office from 1969 until Rickover's retirement in 1982. Duncan also has had access to much of Rickover's personal correspondence, as well as that of his immediate family. Indeed, Rickover's widow wrote the foreword to this book. This is Duncan's third book on Rickover, for whom he candidly admits great admiration. Although the author's familiarity with and admiration for his subject