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# The real bio-terrorists are in Washington

REVIEW BY PHIL SHANNON

## *Bioterror: Manufacturing Wars the American Way* By Ellen Ray and William H Schapp (eds)

Ocean Press, 2003  
80 pages, \$14.95 (pb)

With Iraq invaded and occupied, at last we can all go about our lives free from the fear of anthrax letters in the mail and nerve gas in the subways. That's what the war was all

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# about, right? Disarming Iraq of its chemical and biological “weapons of mass destruction”?

In the irony-free zone of the corporate mass media, this may be the righteous sermon, but, as Ellen Ray and William Schapp's *Bioterror* reminds us, the US has the largest stocks of chemical and biological weapons in the world, has a long and particularly savage history of using them, and of providing them to others to use. Germs were a weapon of choice from as early as 1763, when

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the first smallpox-laced blankets were given to Native Americans as part of a genocidal land-grab. Poison gas was used by all sides in World War I but the US military led the way — with gas shells accounting for 12% of its total artillery use, double that of Germany.

Revulsion against the slaughter and maiming of over 1 million soldiers by gas in the “Great War” resulted in the Geneva Protocol of 1925 to outlaw chemical and biological warfare being ratified by all

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the belligerents — except the US, which in 1922 established the Chemical Warfare Service as a branch of the US Army. The US Army advocated the use of chemical weapons for an invasion of Japan during World War II (but was overruled by President Harry Truman, but only because he preferred the terror of the atomic bomb).

The US also began a biological warfare program during World War II.

Anthrax bombs were produced by the US for use against six major German cities,

in quantities that could have killed half their civilian populations. Their use was only prevented by technical difficulties and the surrender of Germany.

The Cold War soon gave US bio-warriors a second bite of the diseased cherry.

Applying knowledge gained from Japanese bio-warfare experts, in a secret deal that provided immunity from prosecution for war crimes, the US military subjected North Korea and China to germ warfare in the early 1950s. A report by a

panel of leading international scientists described the dazzling array of germ weapons used by the US military: “feathers infected with anthrax; lice, fleas and mosquitoes dosed with plague and yellow fever; diseased rodents; and various instruments contaminated with deadly microbes — toilet paper, envelopes and the ink in fountain pens.”

South-East Asia's “communist villains” justified the use of record amounts of conventional weapons by the US military in Vietnam, Laos and

Cambodia — and the most massive campaign of chemical warfare in history. Fifty-five million kilograms of toxic defoliants were dropped on Vietnam alone in the 1960s, mainly Agent Orange which contained dioxin, a toxin 100 times more poisonous than cyanide. Twelve per cent of the south of Vietnam was dosed with this chemical.

Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese people, as well as thousands of US military personnel, continue to suffer the effects of

dioxin poisoning, such as cancer, neurological disease, liver damage, miscarriages and infant deformities (including hundreds of babies born without eyes). Such is the price of US-style “freedom”.

In 1975, the US “banned” the development of biological (but not chemical) weapons, by ratifying the international Biological Weapons Convention.

However, the “ban” applied only to “offensive” research not “defensive” programs, a

meaningless distinction because the knowledge gained from the former can be, and is, used for the latter.

The biological and chemical research carried out by the Department of Defense (and the CIA) at more than 100 sites (including universities and corporations like Dow Chemicals) is conducted in great secrecy, keeping the crossing of the line between “defensive” and “offensive” research away from prying eyes. The US has obstructed an international protocol

to the Biological Weapons Convention on verification and compliance measures that would allow international inspectors into US facilities.

Just how permeable the membrane is between “defensive” and “offensive” biological warfare research was demonstrated by the severe outbreak in 1981 of the mosquito-borne dengue fever in Cuba (another acceptable target for US biological warfare). Cuba had been free of dengue fever since 1944. There had not been a

case of its most fatal form (haemorrhagic dengue fever, which involves internal bleeding) for 80 years. Yet, from May to October 1981, there were 300,000 cases of haemorrhagic dengue fever; at the outbreak's peak, there were 10,000 new cases per day. More than 150 people died, 100 were children.

The highly unusual epidemiology — simultaneous outbreaks in three widely separated provinces, with no evidence of contact with people from dengue-prone

countries — pointed to the deliberate and artificial introduction of dengue-infected mosquitoes.

Who would have the motive and means to wage this dengue war against Cuba? No need to phone a friend. All US governments have hated Cuba ever since the US “lost” Cuba following that country's revolution in 1959. The CIA had long waged biological warfare against Cuba, which included the infection of Cuba's pigs with African swine fever, Cuba's sugar crop with rust disease and Cuba's

tobacco with blue mould. The US Department of Defense had been experimenting with dengue fever since 1959.

The 1981 dengue outbreak was accompanied by abnormally torrential rainfall, which promoted the rapid spread of infected mosquitos. The US is skilled at cloud-seeding to promote rainfall; it was employed against Cuba in 1969 and 1970 to ravage the sugar crop and in Vietnam to cause flooding. When one of the members of a

CIA-sponsored Cuban exile terrorist organisation in Miami spilled the beans in a US court in 1984, Washington's fingerprints were revealed all over the 1981 dengue outbreak.

With this record, the US government's finger-pointing at the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein for having used “weapons of mass destruction” is, on the moral hypocrisy ladder, at the very top rung. The manufactured indignation by the Bush administration and its corporate-

media megaphones also serves to conceal how the US facilitated the supply of the necessary materials to Iraq that enabled Hussein to use chemical weapons against enemies with Washington's approval (anti-US Iran and rebellious Kurds).

It was none other than Donald Rumsfeld, now Bush's white knight war secretary, who in the 1980s was the key US administration official doing the dirty deals to supply Iraq with 12 or more “dual use” biological

and chemical agents, including Iraq's anthrax seed-stock.

In the anthrax postal scare that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, Iraq was initially fitted-up for the crime by leading administration “hawks”, until the evidence pointed to a former US army biological warfare researcher using anthrax from US government labs. This same bio-researcher had also happened to be in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) at the time of an anthrax outbreak there during

the final months of the brutal, US-backed white minority regime's war against the black majority in 1979.

Thousands of cattle were killed in the outbreak, which also recorded the largest number of humans ever infected in an anthrax outbreak, killing 182 of them. All but four of the 10,738 human victims were black farmers and labourers. With indispensable help from their US bio-warrior ally, the privileged white minority regime had found a marvellous

weapon of mass  
destruction.

With US government  
agencies currently  
undertaking a  
massive extension of  
biological warfare  
research capabilities,  
including ways to  
aerosolise anthrax  
and to genetically  
modify new bio-  
organisms,

Washington's arsenal  
to destroy and  
intimidate those who  
stand in the way of  
US economic power  
and empire grows  
ever more lethal.

US imperialism has it  
all — “legitimate”  
weapons of mass  
destruction,  
“illegitimate”

weapons of mass  
destruction and the  
corporate media's  
“weapons of mass  
deception”.

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