

Anthrax War

Dead silence.....fear and terror on the anthrax trail

Bob Coen and Eric Nadler

Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009, £10 (UK) p/b

Robin Ramsay

Starting with an interest in the anthrax attack on Congress which followed 9/11, the authors, both big league print and TV journalists, investigated the world of CBW, chemical and biological weapons. This is an investigation and an account of the investigation; a written version of a documentary film. And what they found is really scary stuff.

CBW programs are the dirty secret of post-war states. The Soviets, the Americans learned from a defector in 1989, had a monster – and maybe the Russians still do, though officially they don't. (Dr. David Kelley was part of an inspection of the program that doesn't exist.) The Rhodesians used anthrax in the war of the 1970s, killed maybe 10,000 black Africans. The apartheid regime in South Africa had a large programme, Operation Coast, though what it amounted to is as murky as the rest of these stories and lots of its funding may simply have been stolen.

En route they wander into all manner of interesting byways, including the CIA trials in the early 1950s and the Frank Olsen case; and David Kelly and a lot of other dead microbiologists. (Just google 'dead microbiologists' to get a flavour.) This is reminiscent of the dead Marconi scientists. Is someone knocking-off microbiologists? Again they are told that statistically nothing interesting is happening here. But they wonder.

After the anthrax attack in America on politicians – the people who control the spending – the US CBW pork barrel really got rolling and now amounts to \$50 billion a year. CBW is the perfect dollar-generating threat: infinitely expandable and seriously frightening. This being America – the good guys – it's all defensive research, of course; looking for antidotes to possible attack by others. But it means developing the bugs for research into antidotes; and so a defensive program and an offensive program look pretty similar.

At the end we don't know who did the original US anthrax attack and you take your pick. I think some sharp cookie psychopath realised that the post 9/11 climate was perfect for a push in the CBW field and mailed some anthrax. The rest of us better hope the crazy bastard doesn't get us all killed. Because

being America, large chunks of the state's enlarging CBW activities have been handed over to the private sector: bio-Blackwaters. Someone says to the authors, 'It's the Wild West out there' – money sloshing round, programs being cobbled together to get the funds, no regulation worth mentioning. And it would take just one of the 10,000 Americans currently qualified to work in this field to 'go postal' – or one company to begin cutting corners in pursuit of profit.

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