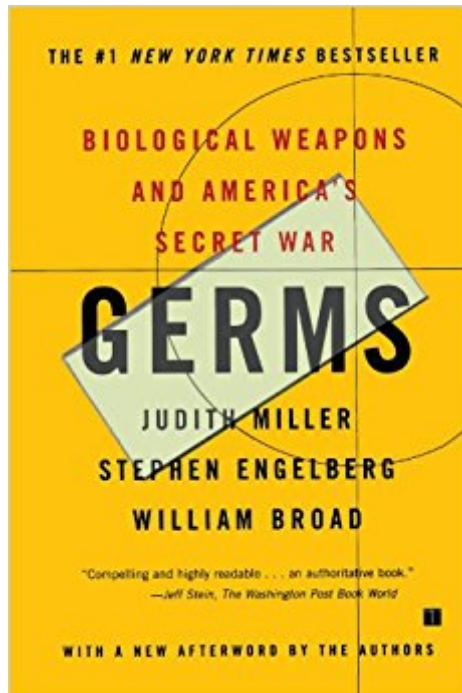


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Germes: Biological Weapons And America's Secret War



Synopsis

In the wake of the anthrax letters following the attacks on the World Trade Center, Americans have begun to grapple with two difficult truths: that there is no terrorist threat more horrifying -- and less understood -- than germ warfare, and that it would take very little to mount a devastating attack on American soil. In *Germs*, three veteran reporters draw on top sources inside and outside the U.S. government to lay bare Washington's secret strategies for combating this deadly threat. Featuring an inside look at how germ warfare has been waged throughout history and what form its future might take (and in whose hands), *Germs* reads like a gripping detective story told by fascinating key figures: American and Soviet medical specialists who once made germ weapons but now fight their spread, FBI agents who track Islamic radicals, the Iraqis who built Saddam Hussein's secret arsenal, spies who travel the world collecting lethal microbes, and scientists who see ominous developments on the horizon. With clear scientific explanations and harrowing insights, *Germs* is a masterfully written -- and timely -- work of investigative journalism.

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition (October 2, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684871599

ISBN-13: 978-0684871592

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (109 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #241,918 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 inÂ Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Biological & Chemical #46 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Arms Control #431 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > International Relations

Customer Reviews

Miller, Engelberg and Broad have written an outstanding and very readable history of the US and foreign germ warfare programs and of national and international efforts to ban biological weapons. Many people spoke more frankly than I would have thought possible, so that the book is very revealing. Biological weapons are more frightening than poison gas, and more deadly than 767s loaded with fuel. Bio-terrorism surely poses a much greater risk to the United States than any

possible ballistic missile attack from a "rogue" state. It is likely that an attack on the US with a communicable disease or a natural outbreak of one of the emerging influenza viruses that appear from time to time and have a mortality rate of 30%, comparable to smallpox, could devastate the country and place the Constitution and democracy at risk. The authors make this clear. "Germs" is not perfect; the authors get the story on the failure of the proposed agreement to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention wrong, because they reported based on only one point of view, and that a tiny minority one. Nevertheless, "Germs" tells a frightening story, and tells it well and accurately. Anybody interested in U.S. national security, the public health system, and the efforts of our country and our adversaries to develop these terrible weapons must read it.

The threats that are described in this book are extremely serious and they deserve serious, accurate, and consistent documentation. This book contradicts itself and gives tabloid phrasing to issues instead of explaining them. Page 166, "Since 100 grams of dried Anthrax was theoretically enough to wipe out a small city", on page 216 they recounted when a five pound bag of sugar was used as a prop to explain that if the five pounds were dried Anthrax, it would kill half the population of the city of Washington, the nation's capital, or about 300,000 people. They then go on at length to discredit this example. If on page 166 100 grams of dried Anthrax would wipe out a small city, why would 5 pounds of dried Anthrax, or 2.25 Kilograms, or 2,250 Grams, or 22.5 times of their example on page 166 be worthy of their ridicule? On the same page they also state that theoretically 5 pounds would kill the 300,000. Hemorrhagic Fevers like Ebola are incredibly lethal, and the symptoms they create are gruesome. If you are interested in the basics of how this type of disease causes death and massive bleeding, this book will not tell you. It is described as a disease that will, "bleed you dry", a great tabloid headline, worthless for understanding the disease. It has been suggested that the terrorists who brought down The World Trade Center could have brought some Bioweapon on board with them. Delivery systems specifically designed to spread disease kill 98-99 percent of the load they carry. How likely would it be that the 1 or 2 percent that would survive a device meant to deliver it alive and lethal would have survived the inferno the planes created? The United States and others have improved on the weapons that deliver these pathogens, and while the efficacy is improved no numbers have been shared. Delivery by aerosol would have been possible, but taking down 2 1500-foot high buildings and many others that surrounded them was evidently enough for one day. There are excellent books that are referenced in, "Germs", that are vastly superior to this work. Some books were written by defectors from the former Soviet Union (mentioned in this book) who ran Soviet production facilities that could make 300 metric tons of

Anthrax every 220 days, others by Doctors from The Center For Disease Control who not only worked in Level 4 Biohazard Labs, they also pursued bugs like Ebola out in the field in Africa. "Scourge", is a recent work that is an excellent history of Smallpox and its eventual, "eradication". There have been a number of books on these topics, and they seem to break in to two categories, there are those that are written by people who are part of the groups that either produce, track these viruses, or work to create defenses against them. And then there are books like this, that from the bibliography appear to be a summation of other primary sources. The former educate, the latter sensationalize. This is a poorly constructed book that is delivered with an editorial slant.

I bought this book in the days after the attacks on 9/11, thinking that it might help me feel better to be well informed and to not fall prey to rumors and gossip. Unfortunately, it has not been a comfort. Well-researched (though I checked a lot of the information online, and found that it had been accessible all of the time had we only looked for it), this is an excellent overview of the history of biological warfare, from the US point of view. I appreciated the writing style .. while accessible to just about anyone, it didn't feel "dumbed down" either.... I was a little dismayed, though. People should be doing more practical research in the area of preparedness, and realize that gas masks are not going to save you if your city is attacked (unless you have a really good one and plan on wearing it 24 hours a day), and that smallpox vaccine you received back in 1972, is unlikely to give you much resistance at this point. This book might prepare you for the fact that an attack could happen at any time, but does not outline any of the precautions you can and should take.

This book explains the terrors of germ warfare, especially if such bombs and devices get into the hands of terrorists and other crazies. The authors did excellent research and show how someone could build one of these bombs for the fraction of the cost what a nuclear device would cost. Scary to say the least. Another new book that I just read and highly recommend as it explains very realistically the danger of nuclear terrorism in our time is THE CONSULTANT by Alec Donzi.

Like all New Yorkers, I have been shattered by the events of the last week and horrified by the loss of life. But once I read this book, which had crossed my threshold on September 12, I became even more aware of the dangers we face as citizens of this city, country and indeed, planet. The book includes surprisingly candid interviews and tales from America's "germ warriors," and holds a staggering amount of information on just what happens when germs are let loose -- as well as the government's long crusade in this frightening arena. As terrifying as the events of this week have

been (who would have ever dreamed it could have been worse?), it could have been. This book educated me to the very real dangers we face. A caveat: stock up on gas masks.

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