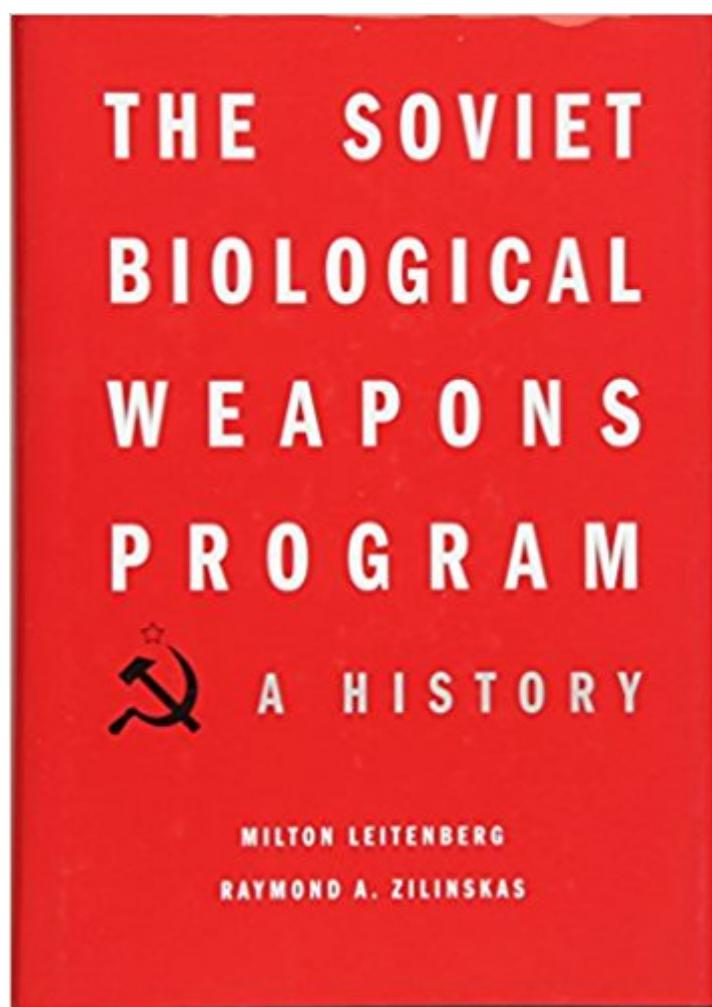


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# The Soviet Biological Weapons Program: A History



## Synopsis

Russian officials claim today that the USSR never possessed an offensive biological weapons program. In fact, the Soviet government spent billions of rubles and hard currency to fund a hugely expensive weapons program that added nothing to the country's security. This history is the first attempt to understand the broad scope of the USSR's offensive biological weapons research—its inception in the 1920s, its growth between 1970 and 1990, and its possible remnants in present-day Russia. We learn that the U.S. and U.K. governments never obtained clear evidence of the program's closure from 1990 to the present day, raising the critical question whether the means for waging biological warfare could be resurrected in Russia in the future. Based on interviews with important Soviet scientists and managers, papers from the Soviet Central Committee, and U.S. and U.K. declassified documents, this book peels back layers of lies, to reveal how and why Soviet leaders decided to develop biological weapons, the scientific resources they dedicated to this task, and the multitude of research institutes that applied themselves to its fulfillment. We learn that Biopreparat, an ostensibly civilian organization, was established to manage a top secret program, code-named Ferment, whose objective was to apply genetic engineering to develop strains of pathogenic agents that had never existed in nature. Leitenberg and Zilinskas consider the performance of the U.S. intelligence community in discovering and assessing these activities, and they examine in detail the crucial years 1985 to 1992, when Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to put an end to the program were thwarted as they were under Yeltsin.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the most authoritative and comprehensive account of an important if arcane subject, requiring prodigious research and care in evaluating and verifying official and unofficial reported information. The book does not address the continuing problem of determining current or future compliance or noncompliance with the Biological Weapons Convention by Russia (or others), but it demonstrates the great difficulties in seeking to do so. (Ambassador Raymond L. Garthoff)Comprehensive...Leitenberg and Zilinskas drill deep into the institutional, scientific and personnel factors in the Soviet program...I have a feeling that students of the Cold War will be digging into it for a long time to come. (David E. Hoffman Foreign Policy)The Soviet Biological Weapons Program is an immense work, and one whose very thoroughness--when conflicting narratives are available, both are offered--can be exhausting. But for those seeking to understand the Soviet Union's complicated relationship with biological weapons, perhaps with an eye toward discerning the Russian Federation's contemporary position, it is an invaluable book. (Jennifer Siegel Wall Street Journal 2013-01-31)This stunningly holistic and definitive account (almost 900 pages) catalogs the entire history of 65 years of Soviet biological warfare research, tracking the various civilian and military Biopreparat programs. These employed as many as 65,000 people from 1928 to 1992, and later resisted the efforts of Russian leaders such as Gorbachev and Yeltsin to shut them down. This volume provides extensive, in-depth coverage, not only of the various civilian and Ministry of Defense efforts, illustrated with useful diagrams, but also of the various doctrines for using weaponized pathogens. Leitenberg and Zilinskas also document the extensive Soviet and later Russian Federation violations of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972, and end with a chilling reminder that even today, the current status of all the programs not verifiably terminated is simply not known...This is a very important, even disturbing, book. (C. Potholm II Choice 2013-02-01)Undoubtedly The Soviet Biological Weapons Program: A History will be the standard and definitive reference source on this issue for years to come, until such times as more archival material becomes available in Russia, US, UK and elsewhere which may help flesh out in greater detail some other aspects of this sad story. The book has no rivals. It is a scholarly work in the finest traditions of academic research covering a complex series of events over many decades: a thoroughly impressive achievement by any standard. (John R. Walker Harvard Sussex Program Occasional Papers, Issue 2)The book is a tour de force and an amazing example of scholarly

achievement. Anyone who has attempted to study the Soviet bioweapons program is aware of the significant hurdles in trying to obtain and verify information about what it entailed. Spanning over a ten-year period, Leitenberg and Zilinskas gathered and analyzed an important and rare collection of declassified US, UK, and Soviet intelligence and policy documents; they also conducted in-depth interviews with a set of former Soviet bioweaponeers and US and British intelligence and policy officials. Through painstaking research, the authors have reconstructed the most detailed account of what constituted the Soviet bioweapons program, with explanations of how the program was supported and justified over the years. The book is unique in that it provides detailed technical, historical, and policy accounts of the Soviet bioweapons program from its commencement in 1927 to its present day status. Leitenberg and Zilinskas bring decades-long technical and bioweapons policy experience to the project, along with a keen understanding of Cold War history, giving the book unparalleled strength and structure. An impressive book. (Kathleen M. Vogel Nonproliferation Review 2012-11-01) This is an authoritative, well-researched (over more than ten years) and comprehensive review of the efforts of the Soviet Union to develop a biological warfare capability. The book is essential reading for anybody wanting a balanced view on what is known and what is still not known about biological activities in the Russian defense area. The book includes an enormous amount of valuable information and technical detail. (Roger Roffey Contemporary Security Policy 2015-07-06)

Milton Leitenberg is Senior Research Scholar at the University of Maryland. Raymond A. Zilinskas is Director of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Nonproliferation Program at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

For at least 20 years (1972-1992) the Soviet Union hid a ~65,000 person offensive biological weapons program. This Soviet program had at least five R&D centers and 7 massive mobilization production centers with weapons filling stations. These were not defensive vaccine research centers. They produced tons of weaponized anthrax, plague, smallpox genetically modified for virulence and designed to bypass existing vaccines. The Soviet Union and now Russia has lied continually about the existence of the program. While we missed a few dozen attackers on 9.11, missing 65,000 people in a weapons program was the largest failure of U.S. intelligence in American history. It was the largest failure of the U.S. arms negotiations. This book lays it all out in excruciating and painful detail. This book is the reference standard for the history of the Soviet biological weapons program.

Detailed and fairly academic, but I doubt you'll find as detailed or as comprehensive of a review on the subject.

This is the most comprehensive book written about the Cold War development of biological weapons in the Former Soviet Union. It is amazing to think that such a large program was hidden from the world for so long. Both Leitenberg and Zilinskas are excellent writers and although the text is a daunting 1000 pages it actually reads quite easily. I recommend this book to history buffs, scientists, military personnel and anyone interested in how it came to be that our world is frightened about the spread of diseases and the threat of biological warfare.

A superior work product with extensive detail and documentation. A "must have" for anyone interested in the history of Soviet Biological Weapons as well as the Soviet Union generally in the past 100 years.

The book was interesting and pulled together a lot of information that is otherwise scattered throughout the literature. While it does shed some light on the Soviet BW program, it is unnecessarily long and includes a lot of repetitive information. It could have been shorter and more focused.

another re hash of already published information, too much political and a lot of "yes this is turn wink wink". But it also has errors about soviet items, even after contacting the authors and providing them with correction they (being the phds they are) were not interested

Comprehensive look at the Soviet BW program. I'm amazed with all the secrecy surrounding the project, the authors were able to compile so much data. Certainly not a light read on the subject.

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