

# Letters and replies on anthrax attacks in the US

21 January 2002

*Several readers have sent in comments and questions about an article by Patrick Martin, "US anthrax attacks linked to army biological weapons plant," posted December 28, 2001. Below we publish the letters with replies by the author.*

In your recent article, you mention that no country admits producing weapons grade anthrax in the past 25 years.

Perhaps not, however, in Ken Alibek's book *Biohazard*, he documents his own involvement in such production in Russia and mentions a number of other countries doing so as well.

Regards,

JM

28 December 2001

*Patrick Martin replies:*

The assertion in my article and the account in Alibek's book do not contradict each other. Since the signing of an international germ warfare treaty which took effect in 1975, all signatory countries have been bound by international law not to produce weapons-grade anthrax. While there have been cases in which major powers have publicly defied other arms control treaties—India and Israel, for instance, refuse to sign or to abide by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—all of the countries which had significant biological weapons capabilities signed the treaty against germ warfare and none has repudiated it.

It is therefore true that "no country admits producing" such materials. This is a long way from suggesting that such materials have not been produced, of course. The press reports in December demonstrated that the US government has been lying to the world for many years in its claims to be observing the letter and spirit of the germ warfare treaty.

Alibek's book confirms that the Stalinist regime in the USSR also continued illegal biological weapons

research at least into the mid-1980s. There is no evidence, however, that such research survived the final Gorbachev years, the drastic deterioration of Soviet military-technical capabilities and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Alibek himself was one of many former Stalinist apparatchiks who went over to capitalism and made a fortune out of it. He actually moved to the United States. Besides his successful book, he has a lucrative biological weapons consulting business based in Alexandria, Virginia.

The conclusion of the WSWs article remains valid: US military labs are by far the most likely source for the weapons-grade anthrax used against Capitol Hill. The anthrax attacks represented an attempt, originating in or around the American military establishment, to kill prominent Democratic Party leaders.

To the WSWs:

Your article states that the existence of the Dugway program was first revealed by the *Baltimore Sun* on December 12. In fact, Judith Miller (who also received an anthrax letter), reported this in the *New York Times* on September 4 and 5.

DP

1 January 2002

*Patrick Martin replies:*

While there was important information in the September 4-5 articles by Judith Miller and others published in the *New York Times*, these articles actually served to conceal the most important facts about the Dugway program. According to the first article by Miller, published September 4, "Officials stressed that the plant never made anthrax or any other lethal pathogen." We now know that this statement is false: the Dugway plant made weapons-grade anthrax which was so dangerous that it was sent to Fort Detrick, Maryland for sterilization so the bacteria could be studied without undue risk to the scientists involved.

The *Times* articles were based on interviews with former Dugway director Jay C. Davis, who gave Miller and ABC News a tour of the facility with Pentagon permission. Miller dutifully reported the Pentagon version of events, writing: “Dr. Davis and other officials said the Defense Department’s lawyers had carefully reviewed the project to ensure that it did not violate the biological weapons treaty or American law. Because it was purely defensive and never made deadly germs, it was both legal and appropriate, he and others said.”

Again, the premise of this legal opinion is blatantly false. The Dugway project did make deadly germs, and was therefore in direct violation of the biological weapons treaty. In view of what was actually going on at Dugway, the Pentagon’s decision to invite *Times* and ABC reporters to the premises and give them a sanitized version of events seems to be a calculated effort at disinformation, using two media outlets that have proven their reliability as conduits for government propaganda.

As in all such disinformation, falsehood and truth are mixed together, and enough new revelations are included to make the piece look like an exposure, when it is really a cover-up. The main revelations came in a second article by Miller, William S. Broad and Stephen Engelberg, published the same day. The most important section reads as follows:

“Over the past several years, the United States has embarked on a program of secret research on biological weapons that, some officials say, tests the limits of the global treaty banning such weapons.

“Earlier this year, administration officials said, the Pentagon drew up plans to engineer genetically a potentially more potent variant of the bacterium that causes anthrax, a deadly disease ideal for germ warfare.

“The experiment has been devised to assess whether the vaccine now being given to millions of American soldiers is effective against such a superbug, which was first created by Russian scientists. A Bush administration official said the National Security Council is expected to give the final go-ahead later this month.

“Both the mock bomb and the factory were tested with simulants—benign substances with characteristics similar to the germs used in weapons, officials said.

“Administration officials said the need to keep such

with projects secret was a significant reason behind President Bush’s recent rejection of a draft agreement to strengthen the germ-weapons treaty, which has been signed by 143 nations.”

Here the writers note the politically important connection between Bush’s blocking the extension of the germ warfare treaty and the Pentagon’s secret plan for genetic engineering of anthrax bacteria. They present the decision to go ahead with genetic engineering of anthrax as still to be made. This fact may be true, but it diverts attention from the equally important action of creating a much more powerful, non-genetically-engineered, weapons-grade bacterium, the one used in the letters to the offices of senators Daschle and Leahy.

A follow-up article by Miller September 5 quotes Spurgeon M. Keeny Jr., a deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency from 1977 to 1981 and president of the Arms Control Association, criticizing the Bush administration. He told the *Times*: “If any other country was found to be doing what we were supposedly doing, they would call it a dangerous violation of the treaty, and it surely appears to be a violation of the treaty in terms of common interpretation.”

Neither Keeny or Miller names that “other country,” but it is clear from this record that while the Bush administration continues the US policy of demonizing Saddam Hussein and claiming that Iraq is seeking to develop biological weapons, the US military was engaged in a flagrantly illegal program of producing just such weapons. The first use of these weapons then took place, not against a foreign “enemy,” but against domestic political targets.



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