

## FILM REVIEW



### Plague War

Lindsey Wachsmann

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Experts interviewed in the film:

**Michael Osterholm PhD**-epidemiologist describing biological exercises

**William Cohen**-Secretary of Defense

**Uncle Festor**-helps teach how to prepare toxins

**Larry Wayne Harris**-Aryan Nation member and author

**Major Brad Perkins**-Commander, 310 Chemical Company

**Dr. Ken Alibec**-worked for the Soviet Union and Russia for over 20 yrs in biological weapons production, research, and testing

**President Mikhail Gorbachev**- was President of Russia from 1985-1991, ordered intense offensive biological research

**President Boris Yeltsin**-President of Russia from 1991-1999, ended offensive biological research, signed decree banning offensive biological research

**Dr. DA Henderson**-Dean of Public Health, John Hopkins University

**William Patrick**-U.S. Bioweapons Advisor 1964-1969

**Matthew Meselson PhD**-Advisor, Nixon Administration

**Gary Crocker**-State Dept. Bureau of Intelligence

**Dr. Christopher Davis**-UK Defense Intelligence, UK Inspector 1987-96

**Gordon Oehler**-Dr. CIA Non-Proliferation Center 1992-97

**Dr. Frank Malinoski**-US Inspector

**Dr. David Kelly**-UK Ministry of Defense

**James Baker**-Secretary of State 1989-92

**James Woosley**-CIA Director 1993-95

**Gennady Lepeshkin**-General Director Stepnorgorsk

Close your eyes and imagine a small Texas town where thousands of people live quiet and happy lives. Children are playing in parks and school playgrounds, yards are being mowed, mail is being delivered, and business is being carried on as usual. Suddenly, terrorists release small pox, the most deadly form, throughout the town. Over 90% of the town will die, hospitals

will be overwhelmed, and each victim of the town has contaminated 1,000 more people before even realizing what they had done. What should parents, teachers, citizens, police, and everyone do?

The situation above is an exercise that one Texas town has utilized to test the town and government's ability to respond to a terrorist attack. Many other towns have organized these types of tests for their cities. However, each town that has participated in these practice exercises has failed miserably. The failure to respond and react correctly in bioterrorist attacks reveals that most cities and states do not have enough resources to handle this type of devastating situation. Most communities have no clue where to begin to prepare and handle these types of attacks.

"Plague War" is a documentary examining the beginning of the age of bioterrorism. It gives an educational, yet interesting view into how bioterrorism began and what it has become in the modern era, after almost 60 years of research and development. "Plague War" is a FRONTLINE production. FRONTLINE is public television's highest rated public affairs series and has been nationally recognized with Emmys, Peabody Awards, and DuPont-Columbia Awards. "Plague War" is part of a documentary series that probes into the heart of issues behind the latest headlines, offering exclusive reports, studies, and history in the environment, military and business affairs, and many social issues of adoption, divorce, drug abuse, healthcare, and racism affecting America and the world.

"Plague War" received its first recognition when the American military came face to face with bioterrorism during the Persian Gulf War. After the first initial realizations of the threat of bioterrorism, the military created Port McClellan in Alabama. At this base, the military would

monitor the air for biological hazards. However, with dozens of biological agents discovered, the lab could only detect a few of these agents.

Anthrax, Plague, and Small pox were the first biologicals considered to be used in biological warfare. This film discusses how easily small amounts of these substances can do deadly amounts of damage to a population, for example, that only 2 pounds of Anthrax spores can saturate Manhattan and cause catastrophic damage. Mostly causing bacterial infections that are transmitted easily, infections are the ultimate weapons of the future.

“Plague War” is not just a war among countries against countries, but “Plague War” has been affecting people throughout the world for some time. Domestic terrorism is the face of bioterrorism throughout the world with the New York City bombing in 1993, the Oklahoma bombing in 1995, the successful release of Sarin gas in a Tokyo subway, and the attempted massive Anthrax release from the top of a Tokyo building.

However, the real “Plague War” may be coming to a city near you in the future. With the success of the Internet and strategically well-written home preparation manuals, everyday release of deadly toxins and biologicals is right around the corner. The Internet brings all types of terrorist together, while equipping them with infectious agents and supplying people with the knowledge to release, cultivate, and distribute these agents. One certain manual for do-it-yourself biological weapons was written by an Aryan Nation member known for sharing how to find Anthrax and Plague in nature, purchasing Anthrax and Plague on the Internet, and believing he will utilize these weapons in the future. This film hints at the questions: are civilians teaching civilians bioterrorism, are terrorists teaching civilians, or is the military (of the world) teaching both civilians and terrorists bioterrorism?

“Plague War” does not just stop there; the film reveals the development of bioterrorism and biological weapons through an historic timeline. Beginning in 1942, when the British first tested Anthrax on sheep and the United States produced and stockpiled Anthrax cluster bombs, the history unravels into a story of secrets, agreements, death, and war. With the British ending their biological programs in the 1950s, the United States continued to research, develop, and test throughout the 1950s and 1960s, making their biological program the largest in the world. However, countries came to terms with biological testing, research, and development in 1972 when the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom “agreed” and signed a treaty banning biological research and development. The “Plague War” was over, but was it?

Secrets of research, development, death, and war took over the “Plague War.” Dr. Ken Alibek reveals over 20 years of secrets of the Soviet Union. The secrets that Presidents, civilians, and scientists used to cover up innocent deaths. Dr. Alibek speaks of the thousands employed, the many facilities, the most dangerous viruses including Ebola and Small Pox, and the plans of using the agents against civilians.

As Soviet leadership changed and Mikhail Gorbachev became President, suspicions of Russian research arose. People began to break their silence. One scientist divulged all his secrets to British intelligence, launching Western inspections into Soviet research affairs. With actual footage of the tours and shady explanations for all the equipment, this film highlights the frightening discoveries and the inability of the Soviets to justify these facilities.

The Soviet offensive biological programs continued to thrive into the 1990s. In 1990, they created a way to reproduce small pox after it had been eradicated in the 1970s with millions vaccinated. However, with the change of a new Russian President, Boris Yeltsin signed a decree banning biological offensive research. If the programs are over, why are inspections of the

defensive facilities not allowed, and why are all the people that were in charge of the old facilities now Generals in the Russian army?

Still this film poses many interesting issues, questions, and theories. Dr. Alibek believes that Russia is attempting to genetically combine deadly viruses like Ebola and small pox. Because Russia has no money for scientific research and refuses to help the scientists that participated in the offensive research, will the unemployed experts sell their expertise and knowledge to the highest bidders?

Biological weapons are easy to produce with many countries, terrorists, and civilians having access to them. The Clinton Administration stockpiled vaccinations and instituted early warning programs for bioterrorism. The real question this film poses is, “what is it going to take to get policy makers to see that all our biological research has not prepared the United States for biological terrorism?”

The cinematography is very usual for a documentary. It is very professional and seems to radiate a serious mood and feeling. Ultimately, I feel as though the plainness of the cinematography wanted viewers to concentrate on the seriousness of the issue with no distractions. However, the lighting is very interesting. The film uses actual footage of when the Soviet facilities were inspected. The facilities are very dark. There is very low lighting in most of the rooms, which seems to represent a feeling that they were trying to hide their equipment and ultimately their motives behind their equipment and facilities. At times it felt as if I was personally walking through the chambers and corridors, peering into the rooms and vats with just a flashlight. I also especially liked the re-creations. For example, at the beginning of the film, you can see the children swinging and hear their laughter. The re-creation of the Soviet scientist who was accidentally infected while researching was very sad and dark. The lighting was dark

like they were covering up the entire situation. The interview with his widow engulfs viewers into the reality of his death and her loss. You could tell that she never really knew what happened to her husband. The film was written by Tom Mangold and Jim Gilmore with Michael Sullivan as the Executive Producer. I believe they were extremely successful in keeping the film serious and informing, while at the same time using lighting and re-creations to entangle viewers in the unraveled timeline of bioterrorism.

The music in this film was very appropriate. The music had a serious tone both in the opening and the closing. Bioterrorism is a subject that has always affected people. The music portrays uncertainty and gives almost an eerie chill into the future.

I believe this film is an exceptional documentary. This film gave an accurate portrayal of the history of bioterrorism, bioterrorism today, and what issues people will face concerning bioterrorism in the future. This movie is valuable in portraying the policy and science behind bioterrorism and biological weapons. It shows and describes to viewers some of the agents and viruses used in bioterrorism. It teaches of symptoms and origination of many different agents. This film reveals the truth about the policy behind biological research. The United States is portrayed as having flaws in its preparation and reaction to bioterrorism along with other countries. However, the film tends to make Soviets appear very untrustworthy and conspiring. Public health is a concern in this film ultimately, but there is a large concentration on the governmental aspect of bioterrorism. The governmental side of the law is present; however no personal rights or particular legal questions are discussed.

I gave the film a high scientific rating. The film discussed many different scientific aspects of bioterrorism. All the information was accurate and informational. I gave the film a

low legal rating because it did not really mention that many aspects of the law. It did not give an legal analysis or explanations. It was mainly informational about the scientific aspects.