

# America's Germ Warfare Capabilities developed in secret in US Corporate Labs

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*The costliest, most grandiose research scheme ever attempted having germ warfare capability is going forward under President Bush and in apparent defiance of international treaties such as the Geneva Convention of 1925 that bans biological agents.*

And this program, involving some of the world's deadliest and most loathsome pathogens, many of which could trigger plagues and epidemics, is being conducted largely in secret without adequate oversight and in flagrant contempt of NIH's own rules.

113 UNIVERSITIES, VA HOSPITALS, PHARMACEUTICAL HOUSES CHARGED WITH REFUSING TO REVEAL BIOTECH RESEARCH OPS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

Some 113 university, government, hospital and corporate laboratories engaged in research often with potential to be used for germ warfare have refused to disclose their operations to the public as required by Federal rules, a nonprofit watchdog agency has charged.

Instead of shutting their operations down, however, the National Institutes of Health(NIH), of Bethesda, Md., the government agency tasked with oversight of these laboratories, allows them to continue to operate, a peculiar stance for an entity that describes itself as "the steward of medical and behavioral research for the Nation."

From California to New Jersey and from Boston to San Antonio, often in the heart of major centers of population, biological warfare labs lavishly financed with their share of about \$20-billion by the Bush administration since 2001 are literally crawling with deadly germs from Spanish flu to plague to anthrax to tularemia to rift valley fever. Reportedly, in some of the laboratories security is lax and safety procedures inadequate to protect the public from exposure to deadly pathogens.

Under U.S. law, recipients of Federal funds for biotech research must comply with guidelines issued by the NIH. These include making available to the public the minutes of the labs' Institutional Biosafety Committees(IBC)meetings, describing their operations and plans. In a number of instances, these IBC's have never bothered to hold a meeting. In other cases, the minutes they furnish are devoid of substance.

Basically, their operations in many cases are being kept secret, according to watchdog Sunshine Project of Austin, Tex., a nonprofit that attempts to protect the public from the risks of biotechnology experiments. The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention(BWC), which the US signed, prohibits research on offensive biological weapons. If the work is performed in secret, however, weapons designed for offensive use could be concealed. In the 1930s, the Japanese military masked its secret germ warfare scheme as a water purification

project.

As the government-funded labs engage in “dual-use research,” (pathogen research having both offensive and defensive applications), Sunshine’s Edward Hammond reports he “has encountered grave problems with the system.” These include “risky experiments approved with dubious safety precautions and/or inadequate IBC review, dysfunctional and otherwise noncompliant committees, and other types of biosafety problems.”

Francis Boyle, an international legal expert at the University of Illinois, Champaign , puts it more bluntly. He called the in-house university committees “a joke and a fraud” that provide “no protection to anyone.” Boyle, who drafted the Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989 enacted by Congress, states the Pentagon “is now gearing up to fight and ‘win’ biological warfare” pursuant to two Bush national strategy directives adopted “without public knowledge and review” in 2002.

Last November 7th, Hammond lodged a complaint with Dr. Amy Patterson, director of the Office of Biotechnology Activities at NIH, citing 113 institutions “for non-compliance with the NIH Guidelines,” specifically for refusing to honor requests for IBC meeting minutes.

“Honoring these requests is not only mandatory under the NIH Guidelines that you are charged with enforcing (but) transparency is also a moral duty of institutions that conduct research, such as rDNA and select agent work that could endanger the public,” Hammond added. He wrote Patterson, “Failing prompt compliance by these institutions we note that your office must do its duty under NIH Guidelines and terminate funding.”

NIH’s Dr. Patterson apparently had troubles of her own obtaining information from labs on the Federal payroll. On Dec. 6, 2004, she issued a “reminder” to universities engaged in research that stated “compliance with the NIH Guidelines is critical to the safe conduct of research and to the fulfillment of an institutional commitment to the protection of staff, the environment, and public health.”

Since 9/11, biotech houses, military laboratories, and State and private universities across America, and others sited in Canada, Australia, and South Africa, have collectively lapped up record sums in Federal R&D dollars.

How big is this enterprise? At just one venue, the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research(SFBR) in San Antonio, Tex., there are 6,000 caged chimpanzees, baboons, and other primates, Sunshine reports, whose upkeep alone costs U.S. taxpayers \$6-million annually. SFBR genetically engineers monkeys and harbors some of the world’s most dangerous viruses such as Ebola and Lassa, authorities state.

Again, the Battelle National Biodefense Institute(BNBI) of Columbus, Ohio, has just received a \$250-million, five-year award from the Department of Homeland Security to run the new biodefense analysis center under construction at Fort Detrick, Md., according to The Washington Post of December 25, 2006. Earlier, on July 30th of last year, The Post reported much of what transpires at the center may never be publicly known as the Bush administration “intends to operate the facility largely in secret.” Battelle also does not maintain an effective IBC, Sunshine charges.

“Some of the resarch falls within what many arms-control experts say is a legal gray zone, skirting the edges of an international treaty outlawing the production of even small amounts

of biological weapons,” The Post reported. “The administration dismisses these concerns, however, insisting that the work...is purely defensive and thus fully legal. It has rejected calls for oversight by independent observers outside the (Homeland Security) Department’s network of government scientists and contractors.”

The paper quoted Milton Leitenberg, a weapons expert at the University of Maryland stating, “If we saw others doing this kind of research, we would view it as an infringement of the bioweapons treaty. You can’t go around the world yelling about Iranian and North Korean programs —about which we know very little —when we’ve got all this going on.”

The Post reported the operation would encompass about 160,000 gross square feet of working area and accommodate a staff of about 120. The Post noted, “Fort Detrick’s history as the incubator of germ warfare research casts a long shadow over the new lab. When the fort held the Pentagon’s very highly classified and long abandoned biological warfare program, it was a magnet for antiwar protests in the Vietnam War era.” In such labs, scientists can create new strains of disease for which those attacked would have no ready defense. Such weapons, once loosed, are notoriously difficult to control, and could ignite epidemics to sicken and terrify civilian populations.

Hammond believes there are about 400 bioweapons agents labs across the U.S., some of which encounter unexpected difficulty when they try to comply with the law. David Perlin, president of the Public Health Research Institute(PHRI) of Newark, N.J., told Sunshine the FBI requested PHRI to enter into an agreement with them to “not publicly disclose which specific select agent pathogens and/or strains are stored at our facility.”

Those who tend to dismiss NIH’s laxity about enforcing its own regulations have only to recall the October, 2001, anthrax attacks on Congress and the media. The deadly strain released is believed to have come from a U.S. germ warfare lab at Fort Detrick although there is no certainty as the FBI has never solved the murders. Since then, the vast proliferation of such labs by the Bush administration has educated many new employees — in some cases undergraduate students — in germ warfare ops. Four employees at Fort Detrick are known to have died after performing lab work.

Lack of transparency is cause for concern if only because of the history of secret CIA and Pentagon experiments in germ warfare that used the American people as guinea pigs. In “Rogue State,” (Common Courage Press) reporter William Blum noted those agencies over two decades “conducted tests in the open air in the United States, exposing millions of Americans to large clouds of possibly dangerous bacteria and chemical particles.”

Between 1949 and 1969, the Army tested the spread of dangerous chemical and bacterial organisms over 239 U.S. populated areas including San Francisco , New York and Chicago with no warnings to the public or regard for the health consequences, Blum wrote. The Pentagon even sprayed navy warships to test the impact of germ warfare on U.S. sailors.

Even deadlier cocktails were secretly provided to dictator Saddam Hussein for his war of aggression against Iran. Washington denied supplying them but as Robert Fisk reported in Great Britain’s “The Independent” last December 31st, “prior to 1985 and afterwards, US companies had sent government-approved shipments of biological agents to Iraq,” including anthrax. Fisk gives this eye-witness account of what he saw on a military hospital train carrying stricken men from the front back to Tehran:

"I found hundreds of Iranian soldiers coughing blood and mucus from their lungs — the very carriages stank so much of gas that I had to open the windows— and their arms and faces were covered with boils. Later, new bubbles of skin appeared on top of their original boils. Many were fearfully burnt. These same gases were later used on the Kurds of Halabja."

Thus, the Reagan administration, which escalated germ warfare research and allowed the sale of the pathogens to Hussein, took its place in the dark annals of military history along with Italy under Benito Mussolini, whose aviators dumped mustard gas on the Ethiopians and Japan under Emperor Hirohito, whose Imperial Army's germ warfare attacks killed thousands of Chinese civilians.

Because of their comparative cheapness to manufacture, biological weapons have been dubbed "the poor man's nuclear bomb." Yet their potential may be even deadlier. Jeremy Rifkin, author of "The Biotech Century" (Penguin), noted a government study in 1993 found "the release of just 200 pounds of anthrax spores from a plane over Washington DC could kill as many as three-million people."

The secret operations of the labs' would be less ominous if the Bush administration hadn't led the fight to demolish the international inspection system. Jackie Cabasso, executive director of Western States Legal Foundation, Oakland, Calif., warned, "Last year (2001), the U.S. single-handedly blew apart an international system for inspections of these kinds of (biological) laboratories, a system that would have made great strides toward ensuring that biodefense labs aren't abused for offensive purposes. Having thumbed our nose at the world, the US is now massively expanding its biodefense program, mostly in secretive facilities."

According to Boyle, President Bush "sabotaged the Verification Protocol for the BWC" as it was on the verge of conclusion and success. He said the U.S. "fully intended to get back into the research, development and testing of illegal and criminal offensive biowarfare programs."

Boyle is the author of "Biowarfare and Terrorism," Clarity Press. And Elisa Harris, former arms control official under President Clinton, told The New York Times in 2003 "It (the administration's actions) will raise concerns in other capitals in part because the United States has fought tooth and nail to prevent the international community from strengthening the germ treaty."

Among pharmaceutical houses not in compliance with NIH disclosure requirements are Abbott Laboratories of Abbott Park and Worcester, Agencourt Bioscience Corp.; Antibody Science, Inc.; BASF Plant Science, Bristol-Myers Squibb and its Pharmaceutical Research Institute of Connecticut; Centocor, Inc.; Chiron; Discovery Genomics Inc.; DuPont Central Research and Development; Embrex, Inc.; Genentech, Inc., Genzyme Corp. of Cambridge and Framingham, Mass.; GlaxoSmithKline, Merck & Co., Inc. and its Rahway, N.J., research site; Integral Molecular; Introgen Therapeutics; L2 Diagnostics LLC; Merck & Co. Inc., West Point; Merck Research Laboratories, Rahway, N.J.; Meridian Bioscience Inc.; Monsanto Co. Mystic, Conn., research; New Link Genetics; NovaFlora, Inc.; NovoBiotic Pharmaceuticals; OSI Pharmaceuticals; Pfizer Inc., and Pfizer Pharmaceuticals of St. Louis, Roche Bioscience, Schering-Plough Research Institute; SelectX Pharmaceuticals; Serono Research Institution; Third Wave Technologies; and Vaxin, Inc. Federal entities involved include the Center for Disease Control, the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, VA hospitals in Stratton, Va.; the Jerry Pettis Memorial hospital and the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Also, the Idaho

National Laboratory, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Plum Island Animal Disease Center of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and Navy Medical Research Center.

Other fund recipients include AERAS Global TB Vaccine Foundation, Battelle, CBR Institute for Biomedical Research, Inc.; Children's Hospital Oakland Research Institute, Children's National Medical Center, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Columbus Children's Research Institute, Hadassah Medical Organization, Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, and Scripps Clinic.

Among universities in non-compliance: Alabama A&M, Albany Medical College, Ball State, Brigham Young, Bucknell, Central Michigan, Drexel College of Medicine, Hackensack University Medical Center, Hunter College, Indiana State University, Purdue University, Loma Linda, Missouri State, New York Medical College, and Queens College of City University of New York.

Also, Rider, Rockefeller University, Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, South Dakota State University, St. John's University, State University of New York at Binghamton, Brockport, and Buffalo; Towson, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School(UMDNJ), and University Medical Center of Southern Nevada. Also, the universities of Arizona, California at San Francisco, Maryland, Massachusetts, Miami, Fla.; Mississippi; Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Southern Mississippi, Texas at Arlington and San Antonio, Tulsa, Utah State, Wake Forest, Washington University in St. Louis, Western Kentucky and Wilkes.

Foreign institutions include the University of Sydney, Australia; the University of British Columbia, and University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. This listing covers most, but not all, of the names submitted to NIH by the Sunshine Project. Three years ago, Sunshine said if it had to pick the labs with the worst biosafety record-keeping, he would choose Princeton University, the University of Texas Southwestern at Dallas; the University of Vermont at Burlington and the University of Delaware at Newark.

Sunshine's Hammond said there has yet to be any formal response to his letter of last November from NIH. He added, "I doubt I will ever get one." The NIH was asked to respond to the charges contained in this article but has yet not done so.

In sum, the costliest, most grandiose research scheme ever attempted having germ warfare capability is going forward today under President Bush and in apparent defiance of international treaties such as the Geneva Convention of 1925 that bans biological agents. What's more, where once the use of germ warfare was an isolated happenstance — such as when an English general in 1767 gave smallpox-laced blankets to the Indians that decimated their tribes — research in this grim area today suggests it has been elevated to an instrument of national policy. And this program, involving some of the world's deadliest and most loathsome pathogens, many of which could trigger plagues and epidemics, is being conducted largely in secret without adequate oversight and in flagrant contempt of NIH's own rules. Why?

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