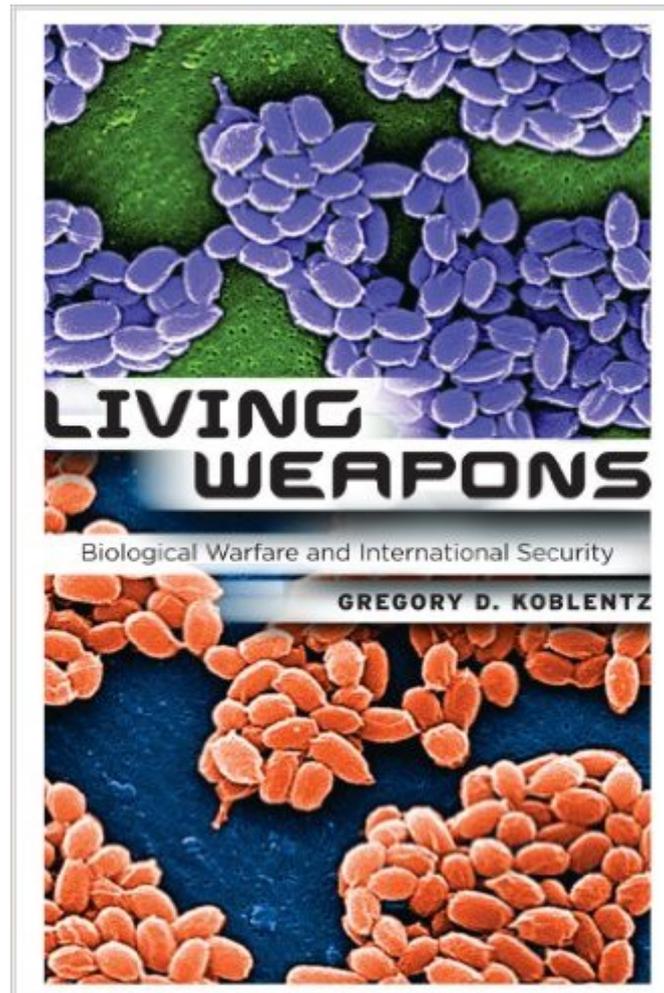


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Living Weapons: Biological Warfare And International Security (Cornell Studies In Security Affairs)



Synopsis

Biological weapons are widely feared, yet rarely used. Biological weapons were the first weapon prohibited by an international treaty, yet the proliferation of these weapons increased after they were banned in 1972. Biological weapons are frequently called 'the poor man's atomic bomb,' yet they cannot provide the same deterrent capability as nuclear weapons. One of my goals in this book is to explain the underlying principles of these apparent paradoxes.â "from Living Weapons

Biological weapons are the least well understood of the so-called weapons of mass destruction. Unlike nuclear and chemical weapons, biological weapons are composed of, or derived from, living organisms. In Living Weapons, Gregory D. Koblentz provides a comprehensive analysis of the unique challenges that biological weapons pose for international security. At a time when the United States enjoys overwhelming conventional military superiority, biological weapons have emerged as an attractive means for less powerful states and terrorist groups to wage asymmetric warfare. Koblentz also warns that advances in the life sciences have the potential to heighten the lethality and variety of biological weapons. The considerable overlap between the equipment, materials and knowledge required to develop biological weapons, conduct civilian biomedical research, and develop biological defenses creates a multiuse dilemma that limits the effectiveness of verification, hinders civilian oversight, and complicates threat assessments. Living Weapons draws on the American, Soviet, Russian, South African, and Iraqi biological weapons programs to enhance our understanding of the special challenges posed by these weapons for arms control, deterrence, civilian-military relations, and intelligence. Koblentz also examines the aspirations of terrorist groups to develop these weapons and the obstacles they have faced. Biological weapons, Koblentz argues, will continue to threaten international security until defenses against such weapons are improved, governments can reliably detect biological weapon activities, the proliferation of materials and expertise is limited, and international norms against the possession and use of biological weapons are strengthened.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Living Weapons: Biological Warfare and International Security" is a very well documented text describing the successes/failures of verification, oversight and the intelligence of biological weapons issues. The first chapter "Offense, defense, and deterrence" discusses the characteristics of biological weapons (microorganisms and toxins) from the United States, Soviet Union and Iraq perspectives. The paradox of biological weapons is well stated on page 42 "The secrecy required to retain the element of surprise in a biological attack reduces a state's ability to issue credible threats to inflict unacceptable damage against an adversary". Chapter two "Verification" discusses the problems of knowing who has what biological weapon and where is it. Chapter three, "Oversight" portrays a scary world when the leaders of the various countries are misled as to the status of their country's biological weapon inventory. Chapter four, "Intelligence" was an eye-opener to me. I was surprised to learn how little the US knew of Soviet, South African and Iraq biological weapons programs. Chapter five "Biological terrorism" discusses the history of biological weapons. This chapter concludes with the ominous statement that long-term prospects of bioterrorism are "worrisome." The "Conclusion" has as its explicit goal of "Reducing the danger posed by biological weapons." This book, while not an easy read, was very informative and worth reading.

Dr. Koblenz's book gives a very honest and real depiction of bioweapons and the different programs throughout history. His points on dual-use technologies and the generations of bioweapons are extremely relevant with the growing discussion over CRISPR and genomic editing. I enjoyed his overview of different international programs, especially the American one. I would highly

recommend this book to anyone interested in biological weapons and their role in international security issues. Koblentz keeps the reader engaged with interesting facts and a touch of humor.

"Living Weapons" is on the ROROTOKO list of cutting-edge intellectual nonfiction. Professor Koblentz's book interview ran here as cover feature on November 23, 2009.

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