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## Dirty War: Rhodesia and Chemical Biological Warfare 1975–1980

By Glenn Cross

Helion and Company, 2017

290 pp., \$ 28.93

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Reviewed By Seth Carus

Glenn Cross's *Dirty War: Rhodesia and Chemical Biological Warfare 1975–1980* is a welcome addition to the small, but growing scholarly literature on the history of chemical and biological warfare. In 1965, the minority white community in the British territory of Rhodesia (officially Southern Rhodesia) rejected demands that it transfer political power to the majority black population. By the mid-1970s, white Rhodesians found it increasingly difficult to counter the growing power of native African nationalists fighting the government. As with many insurgencies, the guerrillas lacked the resources to defeat government security forces in direct combat, but Rhodesian forces were stretched too thin to suppress the insurgents, especially once they had established base camps in neighboring countries. Amidst the conflict, Rhodesian military and intelligence services employed what would now be considered chemical and biological agents against the guerrillas with unknown results.

The Rhodesians adopted a decidedly low technology approach to waging chemical warfare. They made no attempt to acquire or produce any of the agents—e.g. VX, sarin, mustard gas, or phosgene—commonly associated with military chemical warfare programs. Instead, they employed commercially available poisons, primarily parathion (an insecticide) and thallium (used to kill rodents).

Rhodesian intelligence officials, relying on the technical support of a small team based at the University of Rhodesia's medical school, used the infamous Selous Scouts to disseminate material. Another technique was to contaminate clothing with parathion infiltrated through nefarious channels to guerrillas. Contact with the poison treated clothing would kill or incapacitate the wearer.

The Rhodesians also killed a considerable number of guerrillas through poisoned water sources and food, although exactly how many are unknowable. Cross seems most comfortable with an estimate of 1,500–2,500 people. This figure does not account for an unknown number of civilians who came into contact with the poisoned material, evidenced by the dramatic rise in poisoning cases reported by Rhodesian medical authorities.

Cross also discusses Rhodesian use of biological weapons. His account is somewhat confusing since it appears that there were two different biological weapons programs. The first, operated by Rhodesian regulars in the early 1970s, contaminated water supplies used by guerrillas with the pathogen responsible for cholera. Whether these efforts had any effect is impossible to discern. What public health officials call the 7<sup>th</sup> cholera pandemic reached Africa in 1970, so it is possible that claimed cholera outbreaks in guerrilla camps resulted from the natural spread of the disease.

The second program, which was a component of the 1970s chemical program, was much less ambitious. Cross believes that the Rhodesians only made significant use of botulinum toxin, noting claims (of uncertain reliability) that it caused substantial casualties among the guerrillas. His arguments about the limited scope of the second biological warfare program reflect doubt that the government deliberately created Rhodesia's 1978–79 anthrax outbreak, the largest in modern

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history. The outbreak, which killed hundreds of thousands of cattle belonging to the black community, also caused considerable illness in the black population. Statistics, undoubtedly undercounting the true extent of the outbreak, indicate that nearly 11,000 people were affected, including an estimated 200 who died.

According to some accounts, including from sources who Cross considers less than reliable, the outbreak resulted from the intentional introduction of anthrax into native areas, ostensibly to infect cattle and deprive insurgents of a source of food. However, as Cross indicates it is possible to construct plausible natural explanations for the outbreak and its extent so that it is impossible to prove that it was intentional.

This highlights the complexities of CBW attribution—it probably will never be possible to determine

responsibility for the anthrax outbreak or provide a complete picture of Rhodesia's CBW efforts and the consequences of those efforts. Outsiders—even foreign intelligence organizations—were unaware of Rhodesian chemical and biological warfare activities until more than a decade after the conflict came to an end. What few surviving documents exist Cross supplemented with interviews and declassified U.S. Government documents.

The problems Cross encountered are part of the story and highlight the contemporary importance of the efforts by the UN, human rights organizations, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to systemically document CBW use. Almost four decades later, Cross' definitive account of an obscure set of events little known outside the specialist community offers important insight into CBW use by states in combating insurgencies. **PRISM**

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## The Darkest Sides of Politics, II: State Terrorism, “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” Religious Extremism, and Organized Crime

By Jeffrey M. Bale

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492 pp., \$33.77

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Reviewed By Brendan G. Melley

In this companion to his first volume on *Postwar Fascism, Covert Operations, and Terrorism*, Jeffrey Bale explores the influence of some of the world's most pressing security concerns through a review of

global case studies on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), violent extremism, and organized crime. Bale is thorough in his selection and treatment of the cases, using primary sources whenever available and delivering an “intentionally robust” text to provide an alternative to what he describes in the volume's preface as often unqualified opinions taking the guise of academic works. Based on decades of research in violent extremism, Bale reviews select works and either updates their findings, or acknowledges their currency. *State Terrorism, “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” Religious Extremism, and Organized Crime* is dense with explanations and structured expositions, but the volume offers a good model for how to convey conclusions that are framed by evidence.

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