

~~Top Secret~~ [REDACTED]

BIOLOGICAL WARFARE

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USSR: Additional Rumors of an Accident at the Biological Warfare Institute in Sverdlovsk ~~(S)~~

*Reports of a BW accident persist but add little to our knowledge of what actually happened in Sverdlovsk. (S)*

A Soviet emigre reported that three close friends on separate occasions during May 1979 told him of an accident at a biological warfare (BW) institute in Sverdlovsk which resulted in 40 to 60 deaths. Other sources also have heard rumors of such an accident. The specific nature of the accident is unknown, however, and the alleged number of deaths has varied from 40 to 300. Local hearsay in the Soviet Union is known to be unreliable, but [REDACTED] of a quarantine imposed by the military in Sverdlovsk in mid-April tends to support the rumors of a disease-related outbreak. (TS) [REDACTED]

The allegation that numerous deaths resulted from an accident at an unnamed BW institute in Sverdlovsk remains speculation and is only one possible explanation for these rumors. If exposure to a biological agent occurred, it is surprising--unless the agent was a fast acting biological toxin--that the Soviets could not respond with timely effective treatment. The probability is low that the Soviets were working with/a quantity of highly lethal pathogens (except a toxin) sufficient to cause 40 or more deaths without possessing either an effective vaccine or antidote. While a toxin cannot be ruled out as the causative agent, two reports of the accident suggested a disease that also affects cattle, and one source identified the bacterial agent anthrax as a possible cause. ~~(S)~~

There is a suspect BW installation in Sverdlovsk, but it is not known if it is the site of the alleged accident. Despite the proliferation of the rumors of

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a BW-related accident, there is insufficient evidence that the alleged deaths can be attributed to unlawful storage of a BW agent. (S) [REDACTED]

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