

## News Publications

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# New weapons of ethnic cleansing

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Sunday Herald, The , May 9, 1999 by Neil Mackay Home  
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GENETIC weapons capable of wiping out specific ethnic groups are no longer the stuff of science fiction, military and scientific advisers with the British and American governments have admitted.

Technology is now far enough advanced to give even small nations the ability to create so called "G-Bombs", ethnically-targeted biological missiles with warheads tipped with plague or anthrax, designed to eliminate entire racial groups.

An investigation by the British Medical Association has concluded that G-Bombs will become a weapon of war in five years, enabling governments to target victims solely on their genetic make-up. Professor Vivienne Nathanson, head of the BMA's health policy research, said: "Biological weapons had limited use due to the shortcoming of being unspecific in targeting. "However, genetic targeting is now possible. Probably in the next five to 10 years we will see the manufacture of relatively specific biological weapons which are lethal in small volumes. This leaves only a very short timescale to put in place control mechanisms to make sure these weapons are never developed." Nathanson will make her disturbing prediction in a new Channel Four documentary, *Deadly Code*, to be screened as part of the *Equinox* series on May 17. Biological and chemical warfare has always carried a risk of killing the attacking government's troops. But G-bombs would use genetic markers specific only to particular races to trigger the virus - anyone without the genetic marker would be unaffected. Scientists could manipulate the structure of the plague virus to attack only a person who had a race-specific DNA code. One race- specific trait determined by genes is the body's reaction to lactose. Asians and Europeans have different DNA markers determining lactose reaction. This kind of knowledge could be used to construct a virus which only attacks Asians, and could lead to a scenario where a plague- laced bomb dropped on a city would wipe out the entire Asian community but leave every white person alive. Dr Richard Falkenrath, an adviser to the US Department of Defence, said: "The capacity to produce and use biological weapons is increasing, and terrorist groups are more inclined to commit acts of mass violence. I am worried about the convergence of these two trends. A major act of biological terrorism is likely enough for it to be taken very seriously at the level of government." At least 16 countries have bio-weapons programmes, including Syria, North Korea and China. Russia has already developed a new generation of untreatable diseases which are resistant to antibiotics. Major Eric Henschal of the US army's Institute of Infectious Disease said the proliferation of new technology meant the ability to create high-resistance bio-weapons was becoming available to the West's adversaries. Iraq is known to have huge vats of anthrax in isolated labs. Dr Falkenrath said: "The revolution in bio-sciences is every bit as profound as the nuclear revolution and it could have devastating effects on the future of bio-warfare and bio-terrorism." The technology to create genetic weapons is already fairly commonplace. During routine detection work, the FBI's crime labs stumbled on genetic markers specific to blacks, whites, Hispanics and native Americans. Work by the Human Genetic Diversity Project, which collates

information on the similarities and differences in ethnic groups, has found a genetic marker present in the DNA of Palestinians but not Israelis. "If you add together a number of different markers for different populations you can start to be specific to a target population," said Nathanson. Once these markers are identified, a virus could be designed to look for them on entering the body. It would scan the DNA of cells looking for markers and if it found them it would insert itself into the host DNA and start the process of infection. Targeting technology already exists thanks to the race to find a cure for cancer. In Texas, doctors have developed a way to target the poison ricin, which occurs naturally in the castor bean plant, to attack cancer cells. Dr Ellen Vitetta, of the University of Texas, has managed to "train" Ricin to target only cancer cells and leave healthy cells alone. Ricin is attached to an antibody which looks for receptors on the cell's surface. Cancer cells have different receptors to normal cells and only when the ricin antibody identifies them is the poison activated to kill the cancer cell. There is a strong parallel to ethno-weapons as some genetic differences in ethnic groups show up on cell receptors. Millions of pounds are being invested in research to perfect the science of genetic targeting to help treat cancer and other diseases. But the same research can be used to create "perfect" weapons of mass destruction which would wipe out entire races and leave countries and cities unspoilt.

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