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(Ref. only)

Decapitation

\*\*\* Current Classification \*\*\* ~~SECRET~~  
\*\*\* Current Handling Restrictions \*\*\* ~~EXDIS~~

<<<\*\*\* SAS DOCUMENT HEADER \*\*\*>>>

DOC\_NBR= 86MOSCOW14971

FILM= D860659-0590

DATE= 29 AUG 86

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FROM= MOSCOW

DRAFTER= n/a

OFFICE= ACTION SS

TO= SECSTATE WASHDC

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EO= (OADR)

SUBJECT= VISIT TO MOSCOW OF PROFESSOR MATTHEW MESELSON

REFERENCE= 86 STATE 267418

CONTROL\_NBR= n/a

ENCLOSURE= n/a

LOCATOR= TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM

ERRORS= N/A

CONCEPTS= BRIEFING, DISCUSSION, DISEASE, DEATH

TAGS= PARM, EAGR, UR, US, (MESELSON, MATTHEW)

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ACTION SS-00

DECAPTIONED

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir. *MP*  
 Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny  Declassify  
Date 2/22/97 Exemption \_\_\_\_\_

INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 SSO-00 /000 W  
-----054700 291045Z /38

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9702

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 14971

~~EXDIS~~

S/S-O: PLEAS NOTIFY EUR/SOV AT OOB

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PARM, UR, US  
SUBJECT: VISIT TO MOSCOW OF PROFESSOR MATTHEW MESELSON

REF: STATE 267418

1. ~~SECRET~~ ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST

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2. HARVARD PROFESSOR MATTHEW MESELSON DEBRIEFED CHARGE MORNING OF AUGUST 29 ON HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH SOVIETS ON 1979 ANTHRAX OUTBREAK IN SVERDLOVSK. MESELSON SAID THAT SOVIETS OUTLINED WHAT HE CONSIDERED TO BE A PLAUSIBLE SCENARIO THAT THE 1979 OUTBREAK WAS GASTRIC ANTHRAX RESULTING FROM THE INGESTION OF BAD MEAT.

3. MESELSON WILL BE IN TOUCH WITH WASHINGTON ON HIS RETURN. HOWEVER, HE WILL PHONE CHARGE EARLY THIS EVENING. IF DEPARTMENT SEES ANY TOUGH QUESTIONS THEY WOULD LIKE TO ASK MESELSON TO PUT TO HIS INTERLOCUTORS, PLEASE ADVISE BY SECURE PHONE OR  
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IMMEDIATE CABLE.

END SUMMARY

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MEETINGS IN MOSCOW

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4. REFTTEL OUTLINES BACKGROUND TO AUGUST 24 SOVIET INVITATION TO MESELSON. SOVIETS HAVE PAID ALL COSTS OF HIS TRIP.

5. MESELSON MET AUGUST 27 AND 28 WITH DEPUTY MINISTER OF HEALTH PETER BURGASOV AND THREE OTHER SOVIET DOCTORS, WHO ALL PARTICIPATED IN MEDICAL EFFORTS IN SVERDLOVSK (BURGASOV HAD HEADED MEDICAL

TEAM). MESELSON CHARACTERIZED DISCUSSIONS AS OPEN AND INFORMAL. MESELSON'S INTERLOCUTORS SAID THEY HAD BEEN TOLD TO GIVE HIM EVERYTHING HE WANTED.

#### SOVIET SCENARIO

6. FOLLOWING IS GIST OF INFORMATION SOVIETS GAVE MESELSON. THERE WERE 96 CASES OF GASTRIC ANTHRAX, OF WHICH 64 DIED. (MESELSON COMMENTED THAT THIS ROUGHLY MATCHED THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S LOWEST REASONABLE ESTIMATE OF 40 FATALITIES.)

7. THE FIRST VICTIM WAS ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL NO. 40 IN SVERDLOVSK ON APRIL 4. WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, FOUR OTHER VICTIMS WERE ADMITTED WITH SIMILAR SYMPTOMS. PHYSICIANS IN SVERDLOVSK DID NOT IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZE THAT THEY WERE SUFFERING ANTHRAX NOR DID THEY EXPECT ANTHRAX IN APRIL; IT IS MOST PREVALENT IN SUMMER. (SOVIETS DID TELL MESELSON

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THAT ROUGHLY 2 MILLION INNOCULATIONS ARE GIVEN EACH YEAR IN THE SVERDLOVSK REGION AGAINST GASTRIC ANTHRAX.)

8. ON APRIL 10 THE HOSPITAL RECEIVED THE FIRST LAB REPORTS SHOWING GASTRIC ANTHRAX. SUBSEQUENTLY, BURGASOV'S MINISTRY OF HEALTH TEAM WAS CALLED IN; THEY ASSUMED AND KEPT CONTROL OF THE MEDICAL EFFORT THROUGHOUT THE OUTBREAK.

9. SOVIETS TOLD MESELSON THAT CAUSE OF THE OUTBREAK WAS BAD MEAT. GIVEN THE HARSH WINTER AND LACK OF FODDER STOCKS, ELEVEN FACILITIES IN THE SVERDLOVSK AREA WERE PRODUCING ANIMAL FEED FROM BUTCHERED ANIMAL WASTE PRODUCTS. THOUGH SUCH FEED SHOULD HAVE BEEN STERILIZED, ONE FACILITY IN AMARIL PRODUCED 29 TONS OF FEED THAT WERE NOT STERILIZED BY THOROUGH, HIGH-TEMPERATURE BAKING AND WERE SOLD TO PRIVATE BUYERS DURING MARCH 24-29.

10. SOVIETS BELIEVE ALL CASES RESULTED FROM CONSUMPTION OF MEAT PRODUCTS FROM SHEEP, COWS AND SWINE THAT HAD BEEN FED THE SUSPECT FEED. IN ADDITION, SOVIETS TOLD MESELSON THAT 600 STRAY DOGS IN SVERDLOVSK HAD BEEN EXTERMINATED.

11. SOVIETS HAVE PROVIDED MESELSON WITH WHAT THEY SAY IS ORIGINAL COPY OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH REPORT ( IN RUSSIAN) AND ABOUT ONE DOZEN WARNINGS THAT WERE POSTED IN SVERDLOVSK FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK. HE

WAS ALSO SHOWN AUTOPSY REPORTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9703

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 02 OF 03 MOSCOW 14971

~~EXDIS~~

S/S-O: PLEAS NOTIFY EUR/SOV AT OOB

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PARM, UR, US  
SUBJECT: VISIT TO MOSCOW OF PROFESSOR MATTHEW MESELSON

MESELSON COMMENT

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12. MESELSON NOTED THAT, WHILE HE HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING WHETHER THE SOVIET STORY WAS TRUE, IT DID SEEM TO HANG TOGETHER AND WAS THE FIRST COMPLETE SCENARIO HE HAD SEEN FROM THE SOVIET SIDE. (HE ADDED THAT THE SHORT TIME FROM SALE OF THE TAINTED FEED TO THE FIRST OUTBREAK WAS PLAUSIBLE.) IF THIS SCENARIO WERE NOT TRUE, THEN IT HAD BEEN "WELL-REHEARSED", THOUGH MESELSON DID NOT FEEL THAT HIS INTERLOCUTORS WERE REPLAYING A SCRIPTED PRESENTATION.

13. MESELSON FULLY AGREED WITH US THAT THE QUESTION WAS WHY THE SOVIETS HAD WAITED SO LONG TO PUT OUT

THEIR STORY; WHY NOT FIVE YEARS AGO? ASKED THE QUESTION BY MESELSON, BURGASOV HAD RESPONDED THAT SVERDLOVSK HAD BEEN A NATIONAL TRAGEDY (THE BIGGEST ANTHRAX OUTBREAK IN HISTORY); THIS HAD BEEN FOLLOWED BY PRESS -- AND SUBSEQUENTLY USG -- CHARGES THAT THE

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OUTBREAK RESULTED FROM ACCIDENT AT A COVERT BW FACILITY. THE SOVIETS DID NOT WANT TO GET INTO AN EMBARRASSING PUBLIC EXCHANGE.

#### MESELSON'S NEXT STEPS

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14. MESELSON ASKED BURGASOV HOW HE MIGHT GO TO SVERDLOVSK TO SEE THE SUSPECT FACILITY. BURGASOV REPLIED THAT IT WAS NOT UNDER HIS JURISDICTION, BUT HE WOULD CHECK AND GET BACK TO MESELSON.

15. BURGASOV SAID SOVIETS WERE PREPARED TO PUBLISH A SCIENTIFIC MANUSCRIPT ON SVERDLOVSK AND OFFERED TO GIVE MESELSON A COPY PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE. MESELSON DECLINED BURGASOV'S OFFER TO APPEAR AS A CO-AUTHOR, BUT SAID HE WOULD EDIT THE PAPER AND COULD WRITE AN INTRODUCTION BASED ON HIS TRIP HERE.

16. MESELSON INVITED HIS INTERLOCUTORS TO THE U.S. THEY REPLIED THAT THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO COME TO ADDRESS A SCIENTIFIC AUDIENCE, BUT NOT A PUBLIC GROUP.

17. MESELSON ALSO PROPOSED THAT ANOTHER GROUP OF U.S. SCIENTISTS COME TO MOSCOW AFTER THEY HAD DIGESTED THE SOVIET MANUSCRIPT.

#### ACTION REQUEST

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18. MESELSON MAY BE SEEING HIS INTERLOCUTORS AGAIN TONIGHT AND -- IF HE CANNOT GET A TICKET ON 8/30 PAN AM FLIGHT -- TOMORROW. (IF HE CAN'T DEPART ON THE SATURDAY MORNING PAN AM FLIGHT, HE WILL LEAVE SUNDAY MORNING ON AEROFLOT.) HE PLANS TO CALL CHARGE

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THIS EVENING. IF DEPARTMENT HAS PARTICULAR QUESTIONS ON SCENARIO OUTLINED IN PARAS. 6-11 THAT WE MIGHT SUGGEST TO MESELSON, PLEASE ADVISE BY CABLE OR SECURE PHONE BY 10:00 A.M. WASHINGTON TIME.

COMMENT

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19. WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION HERE TO JUDGE THE SCENARIO SOVIETS HAVE DESCRIBED TO MESELSON. HE WILL GIVE WASHINGTON A FULL DEBRIEF ON HIS RETURN. (SOVIETS KNOW HE IS AND WILL BE TALKING TO USG.)

20. WE FIND INTERESTING, HOWEVER, THE SUDDENNESS WITH WHICH THE SOVIETS PUT THIS TOGETHER. THERE IS THE INTERESTING COINCIDENCE OF OUR AUGUST 21 DEMARCHE TO THE MFA ON BWC VIOLATIONS, THOUGH SOVIETS HAVE SAID NOTHING TO MESELSON TO SUGGEST ANY LINK.

21. SOVIET TIMING MAY BE AFFECTED BY THE SEPTEMBER 8-26 BWC REVIEW CONFERENCE. HOWEVER, IF THEY ARE GOING FORWARD WITH A SCIENTIFIC MANUSCRIPT, EVEN WITH A PUSH FOR EARLY PUBLICATION, THEY WILL NOT HAVE ANYTHING OUT PUBLICLY UNTIL WELL AFTER THE REVCON.. BUT THIS MAY BE THE FORERUNNER

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
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~~SECRET~~ SECTION 03 OF 03 MOSCOW 14971

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PARM, UR, US

SUBJECT: VISIT TO MOSCOW OF PROFESSOR MATTHEW MESELSON

OF A SOVIET EFFORT -- AS PART OF THEIR  
OVERALL PEACE CAMPAIGN -- TO TRY TO PUT  
THE SVERDLOVSK ALBATROSS TO REST.

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\*\*\* Current Classification \*\*\* SECRET

