

\*\*\* Current Classification \*\*\* ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
\*\*\* Current Handling Restrictions \*\*\* n/a

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

DOC\_NBR= 88MOSCOW01894

FILM= D880086-0345

DATE= 01 FEB 88


TYPE= TE

FROM= MOSCOW

DRAFTER= n/a

OFFICE= ACTION EUR

TO= STATE  
LENINGRAD

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.   
 Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny  Declassify  
Date 2/22/99 Exemption \_\_\_\_\_

CHANNEL= n/a

ORIGHAND= n/a

ORIGPHAND= n/a

ORIGCLASS= ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

ORIGPCLASS= n/a

EO= OA

SUBJECT= DISCUSSIONS ON 1979 SVERDLOVSK - "ANTHRAX" INCIDENT AND CURRENT -  
STATUS OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

REFERENCE= n/a

CONTROL\_NBR= n/a

ENCLOSURE= n/a

LOCATOR= TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM

ERRORS= N/A

CONCEPTS= INCIDENT, STATUS, CHEMICAL WEAPON, VISIT, NEGOTIATION

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

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PRS-01 SARN-01 SDEL-03 SART-01 P-02 /093 W  
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R 011637Z FEB 88  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3217  
INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PREL PARM UR US  
SUBJECT: DISCUSSIONS ON 1979 SVERDLOVSK  
- "ANTHRAX" INCIDENT AND CURRENT  
- STATUS OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS  
- NEGOTIATIONS BY VISITING ACADEMIC  
- DR. MATTHEW MESELSON

1. ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ - ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY  
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2. VISITING HARVARD BIOCHEMIST MATTHEW  
MESELSON HAS INVITED SOVIET SCIENTISTS  
TO THE U.S. TO DISCUSS THE 1979 SVERDLOVSK  
"ANTHRAX" INCIDENT. NO DATES FOR THE PROPOSED  
VISIT HAVE BEEN SET. MESELSON HAS ASKED TO VISIT  
AN MOD FACILITY IN SVERDLOVSK; THE SOVIETS  
RESPONDED THAT SUCH A REQUEST MUST BE CONSIDERED  
ON THE BASIS OF RECIPROCITY. A SOVIET MOD  
GENERAL STAFF ARMS CONTROL DIRECTORATE OFFICER

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EXPRESSED CONCERN TO MESELSON REGARDING THE  
EFFECT OF U.S. BINARIES ON CW NEGOTIATIONS.  
MESELSON CRITICIZED NOVOSTI CHIEF FALIN'S  
RECENT REMARKS ON TAKING ASYMMETRICAL STEPS,  
INCLUDING GENETIC ENGINEERING, SHOULD ARMS  
CONTROL FAIL. HE ASSESSED THE SOVIET EXPLANATION  
OF THE SVERDLOVSK INCIDENT AS PLAUSIBLE  
BUT ADDED THAT WHETHER IT WAS TRUTHFUL  
WAS ANOTHER QUESTION.

END SUMMARY.

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3. HARVARD BIOCHEMIST MATTHEW MESELSON, VISITING MOSCOW AT THE INVITATION OF THE SOVIET ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, MET JANUARY 28 WITH DATT AND POLOFF TO BRIEF EMBASSY ON HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH SOVIET SCIENTISTS AND A SOVIET MOD OFFICIAL REGARDING THE 1979 "ANTHRAX" INCIDENT AT SVERDLOVSK AND THE CURRENT STATUS OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS IN GENEVA. MESELSON'S DISCUSSIONS WERE TO CONTINUE AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH JANUARY 29. (NOTE: MESELSON COMMENTED THAT, DUE TO THE SHORT NOTICE OF HIS ARRIVAL, HE HAD NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO ARRANGE SOME OF THE MEETINGS FOR WHICH HE HAD HOPED. END NOTE.)

ORGANIZING A DISCUSSION ON SVERDLOVSK  
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4. MESELSON SAID THE PURPOSE OF HIS TRIP WAS TO RESURRECT HIS 1983 ATTEMPT TO BRING  
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SOVIET SCIENTISTS FAMILIAR WITH THE 1979 SVERDLOVSK "ANTHRAX OUTBREAK" TO THE U.S. TO MEET WITH CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL OFFICIALS, OTHER MEDICAL SPECIALISTS, AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. THE PROSPECTS FOR A 1983 VISIT HAD APPEARED PROMISING UNTIL FLIGHT KAL 007 HAD BEEN SHOT DOWN, AFTER WHICH HE WAS TOLD THAT THE ATMOSPHERE FOR SUCH DISCUSSIONS WAS NOT FAVORABLE. SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH SOVIET SCIENTISTS IN 1986 HAD LED TO TENTATIVE AGREEMENT TO (A) ORGANIZE SUCH A VISIT BY SOVIET SCIENTISTS TO THE U.S.; (B) PUBLISH A SOVIET-DRAFTED ARTICLE ON THE 1979 INCIDENT IN A U.S. SCIENTIFIC OR MEDICAL JOURNAL; AND (C) BRING A GROUP OF U.S. ANTHRAX SPECIALISTS TO THE SOVIET UNION FOR DISCUSSIONS, POSSIBLY TO INCLUDE A VISIT TO SVERDLOVSK.

5. MESELSON MET JANUARY 26 WITH SOVIET EPIDEMIOLOGISTS BURGASOV AND NIKIFOROV, BOTH OF WHOM CLAIM DIRECT EXPERIENCE IN TREATING VICTIMS OF THE 1979 OUTBREAK. BOTH ACCEPTED INVITATIONS TO VISIT BOSTON AT A YET-TO-BE-AGREED DATE TO DISCUSS THE SVERDLOVSK INCIDENT; BOTH ALSO EXPRESSED INTEREST IN MEETING WITH AIDS RESEARCHERS DURING THEIR STAY IN THE

U.S. MESELSON ALSO PROVIDED THEM WITH AN OUTLINE OF "SUGGESTED TOPICS" TO DEAL WITH IN A PROSPECTIVE SOVIET-DRAFTED ARTICLE ON THE SVERDLOVSK PROBLEM. (NOTE: THE TWO SOVIET SCIENTISTS EARLIER HAD SENT MESELSON A DRAFT ARTICLE, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS VAGUE AND DISORGANIZED. END NOTE.)

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
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CHEMICAL WEAPONS (CW) NEGOTIATIONS  
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6. MESELSON MET JANUARY 27 WITH COL. VITALIY MATVEYEVICH GONZHA (PHONETICALLY) AT THE LATTER'S REQUEST TO DISCUSS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE GENEVA CW NEGOTIATIONS AT THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT (CD). GONZHA, WHO BILLED HIMSELF AS A MEMBER OF THE SOVIET CD DELEGATION, CLAIMED THAT GENERAL

NIKOLAY CHERVOV, CHIEF OF THE MOD GENERAL STAFF ARMS CONTROL DIRECTORATE, HAD WANTED TO MEET WITH MESELSON BUT WAS ATTENDING INF TREATY "RATIFICATION DISCUSSIONS" AT THE SUPREME SOVIET. (NOTE: MESELSON HAS HAD NO PREVIOUS CONTACT WITH CHERVOV AND WAS UNSURE AS TO WHY CHERVOV HAD TAKEN AN INTEREST IN HIS VISIT. END NOTE.)

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7. GONZHA ASKED MESELSON FOR HIS VIEWS REGARDING THE EFFECT OF THE U.S. BINARY PROGRAM ON THE CW NEGOTIATIONS, PARTICULARLY ON HOW BINARIES MIGHT COMPLICATE VERIFICATION PROBLEMS. MESELSON RESPONDED THAT, AS LONG AS ONE OF THE TWO CHEMICAL AGENTS IN BINARY PROJECTILES FELL UNDER TREATY CONTROL PROVISIONS, BINARIES SHOULD POSE NO ADDED INHERENT VERIFICATION DIFFICULTIES. THE UNIQUE CONFIGURATION OF THE BINARY PROJECTILE WOULD ALSO AID IN VERIFICATION EFFORTS. THIRD, AS BINARIES REPRESENTED MODERNIZATION AND REPLACEMENT OF AN EXISTING PROJECTILE, FROM THE TECHNICAL POINT OF VIEW THEIR PRODUCTION SHOULD NOT IMPEDE ACHIEVEMENT OF A CW BAN. FROM THE POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW, HOWEVER, MESELSON AGREED WITH GONZHA THAT BINARY PRODUCTION COULD SLOW THE MOMENTUM TOWARD A CW BAN AS THIRD COUNTRIES MIGHT DECIDE THAT, IF THE U.S. WAS PRODUCING CW, SO SHOULD THEY. DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIGEYE BOMB COULD ALSO DAMAGE PROSPECTS FOR A BAN, HE CONTINUED, AS IT WOULD BE A NEW WEAPON RATHER THAN MODERNIZATION OF AN EXISTING ONE. CONCLUDING, MESELSON SAID HE WAS OPTIMISTIC REGARDING A CW BAN BECAUSE OF SOVIET INTEREST IN COMPLETING THE CONVENTION AND U.S. PUBLIC AND COMMERCIAL SUPPORT FOR A BAN.

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8. GONZHA AGREED GENERALLY WITH MESELSON'S ASSESSMENT, SAYING THAT THERE WERE NO INSOLUBLE PROBLEMS BLOCKING ACHIEVEMENT OF A CW BAN.  
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TERMINATION OF ALL CW PRODUCTION WOULD BUILD MUTUAL TRUST, HOWEVER. THE SOVIET UNION

DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE U.S. DECIDED TO GO AHEAD WITH BINARY PRODUCTION WHEN THE SOVIETS HAD TERMINATED PRODUCTION "AT APPROXIMATE PARITY OF STOCKPILES." ALTHOUGH AGREEING THAT WHETHER CW MUNITIONS WERE BINARY OR UNITARY "MAKES NO DIFFERENCE" TECHNICALLY, GONZHA SAID THAT BINARIES NONETHELESS POSED OTHER PROBLEMS. WHEN GONZHA WELCOMED NEWS THAT THE U.S. PUBLIC AND CHEMICAL INDUSTRY OPPOSED BINARIES, MESELSON CORRECTED HIM, NOTING THAT HE HAD SAID ONLY THAT THERE WAS SUPPORT FOR A CW BAN IN THE U.S.

9. ALTHOUGH GONZHA BELIEVED THAT MOST PROVISIONS FOR A CW BAN WERE AGREED, HE REMARKED THAT HE SAW PROBLEMS WITH REGARD TO (A) BINARIES, (B) COMMERCIAL VERIFICATION, AND (C) THE JURISDICTION OF VERIFICATION OF NON-PRODUCTION. ASKED FOR HIS VIEWS ON THE PROBLEMS THAT TRANSNATIONAL CHEMICAL CORPORATIONS POSED TO THE CONVENTION, MESELSON DECLINED COMMENT, CLAIMING ON SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE IN THIS FIELD.

#### SVERDLOVSK AND THE CW TREATY

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10. MESELSON POINTED OUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING "NO SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET" WHEN THE CW TREATY EVENTUALLY CAME UP FOR RATIFICATION. IN THAT CONTEXT, HE

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R 011637Z FEB 88  
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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
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URGED A FULL DISCUSSION OF THE 1979 SVERDLOVSK INCIDENT. GONZHA AGREED THAT SUCH A DISCUSSION WOULD BE USEFUL. WHEN MESELSON DESCRIBED HIS EFFORTS TO ARRANGE SUCH A DISCUSSION AND A POSSIBLE SVERDLOVSK VISIT, GONZHA SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE BETOER TO ARRANGE THE SVERDLOVSK TRIP THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH THAN THROUGH THE MOD. MESELSON POINTED OUT THAT ONE OF THE FACILITIES ON THE 1972 BWC DECLARATION LIST -- THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR MICROBIOLOGY -- WAS AN MOD FACILITY; GONZHA RESPONDED THAT A REQUEST TO VISIT ANY OF THE FACILITIES ON THE DELCARATION LIST WOULD HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH ON THE BASIS OF RECIPROCITY. GONZHA NONETHELESS AGREED TO TRANSMIT MESELSON'S REQUEST REGARDING THE FACILITY TO APPROPRIATE MOD OFFICIALS.

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11. ASKED WHAT MEASURES GONZHA THOUGHT SHOULD BE TAKEN TO INCREASE CONFIDENCE BEFORE AN EVENTUAL CW CONENTION WAS SIGNED, GONZHA APPLAUDED THE RECENT SHIKHANY/TOOELE RECIPROCAL VISITS AND SAID THAT, IN RESPONSE TO SOVIET "OPENNESS" IN DECLARING THE SIZE OF ITS CW STOCKPILE, THE U.S. SHOULD DECLARE ITS STOCKPILE SIZE. HE ALSO URGED CESSATION OF BINARY PRODUCTION.

FALIN COMMENTS  
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12. AS AN ASIDE, MESELSON REFERRED GONZHA TO A DECEMBER 11, 1987 NEW YORK TIMES PIECE BY FLORA LEWIS IN WHICH NOVOSTI CHIEF VALENTIN

FALIN HAD REMARKED THAT, IF ARMS CONTROL EFFORTS COLLAPSED, THE SOVIETS WOULD TAKE "ASYMMETRICAL STEPS," INCLUDING GENETIC ENGINEERING. MESELSON SAID THAT SUCH REMARKS WERE DISTURBING AND DID NOT BUILD MUTUAL TRUST. GONZHA MADE NO COMMENT.

ASSESSING SVERDLOVSK  
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13. IN CLOSING, EMBOFFS ASKED MESELSON FOR HIS ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET EXPLANATIONS OF THE 1979 SVERDLOVSK INCIDENT AS CAUSED BY AN OUTBREAK OF ANTHRAX. MESELSON SAID THE SOVIET EXPLANATION WAS COMPLETELY PLAUSIBLE. UNLIKE THE U.S., WHERE ANTHRAX EPIDEMICS WERE RARE AND WHERE STRICT FDA REGULATIONS DID NOT  
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ALLOW THE SPREAD OF AN EPIDEMIC TO HUMANS, SANITATION AND CONTROL STANDARDS IN THE SOVIET UNION WERE LOW. OFFICIAL SOVIET STATISTICS OFTEN REPORTED ANTHRAX OUTBREAKS, BUT ARTICLES RARELY WERE PUBLISHED ABOUT THE INCIDENTS. OTHER EPIDEMICS, SUCH AS A 1980 OUTBREAK OF TYPHUS IN UZBEKISTAN, WHEN 30 OR MORE PEOPLE HAD DIED, WERE NOT REPORTED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. WHILE THE SOVIET EXPLANATION APPEARED PLAUSIBLE, HOWEVER, WHETHER IT WAS COMPLETELY TRUTHFUL WAS ANOTHER QUESTION. REMARKING THAT THE TRUTH MIGHT NEVER BE KNOWN ABOUT SVERDLOVSK, HE OPINED THAT A VISIT TO THE MOD FACILITY IN SVERDLOVSK ON THE BASIS OF RECIPROCITY MIGHT BE USEFUL IN DETERMINING WHETHER ANYTHING HAD OCCURRED THERE.

14. MESELSON SAID THAT, SHOULD OTHER MEETINGS BE ARRANGED DURING THE REMAINJER OF HIS MOSCOW STAY, HE WOULD CONTACT APPROPRIATE USG OFFICIALS UPON HIS RETURN TO THE U.S.

15. LENINGRAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.  
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