



Phantom Menace or Looming Danger? A New Framework for Assessing Bioweapons Threats

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How do analysts produce knowledge about contemporary biological weapons threats? Vogel examines a series of historical and contemporary case studies involving state and non-state actors -- Soviet anthrax weapons development, the Iraqi mobile bioweapons labs, and two synthetic genomic experiments – to show how social factors at the laboratory, organizational, and political levels have shaped United States bioweapons assessments since the 1990s and continue to do so. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from the field of science and technology studies and interviews with intelligence community analysts and policymakers, these case studies reveal important taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots in how knowledge about biological weapons and proliferation has been produced. These shortcomings have led to failures in how US bioweapons intelligence assessments have been conducted, interpreted, and used for national security policymaking. To remedy these problems, Vogel proposes a new way of analyzing bio weapons-related technologies and broader WMD threats using a synthesis of technical and social science methodologies.

Kathleen Vogel is an associate professor at Cornell, with a joint appointment in the Department of Science and Technology Studies and the Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies. Vogel holds a Ph.D. in biological chemistry from Princeton University. Prior to joining the Cornell faculty, she was appointed as a William C. Foster Fellow in the U.S. Department of State's Office of Proliferation Threat Reduction in the Bureau of Nonproliferation.