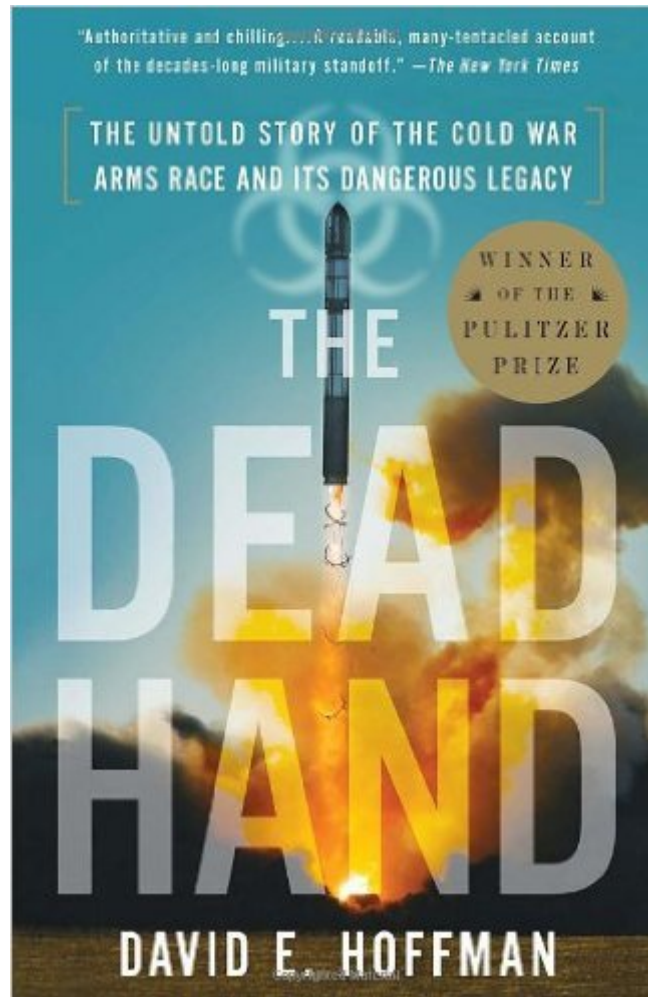


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The Dead Hand: The Untold Story Of The Cold War Arms Race And Its Dangerous Legacy



Synopsis

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE The first full account of how the Cold War arms race finally came to a close, this riveting narrative history sheds new light on the people who struggled to end this era of massive overkill, and examines the legacy of the nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that remain a threat today. Drawing on memoirs, interviews in both Russia and the US, and classified documents from deep inside the Kremlin, David E. Hoffman examines the inner motives and secret decisions of each side and details the deadly stockpiles that remained unsecured as the Soviet Union collapsed. This is the fascinating story of how Reagan, Gorbachev, and a previously unheralded collection of scientists, soldiers, diplomats, and spies changed the course of history.

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Customer Reviews

The Dead Hand details secrets from the Soviet Union's military and research industries - secrets that are so dark as to reframe the historical interpretation of that country and its leadership during the Cold War. The Soviets referred to a semi-automatic defense plan as the "Dead Hand." The Dead Hand was a system that would fire a portfolio of SS-18's on to the United States and Western Europe if its sensors made the conclusion that the Kremlin had been destroyed by a nuclear blast. The system was in place as early as the mid-80s. It is a bit of a miracle, given the demonstrated shortcomings of Soviet engineering, that it never made a mistake. There's more to the spirit of the Dead Hand, though. Much of this book is about the extensive germ warfare research that the

Soviets conducted in violation of international law. Hoffman has managed to track down the assorted scientists who worked in the Urals, in Kazakhstan, in Siberia, the Aral Sea, and other places. Each one has a small part to play in a dark effort. The Soviets weaponized all kinds of killer bugs - plague, smallpox, anthrax, tularemia, and others. The Soviets created anti-biotic resistant strains of each. Some were hybrid bugs that would kill in two stages over several weeks. In the last days of the Soviet Unions, leaders like Sam Nunn and Les Aspin worked to identify and eliminate nuclear stockpiles. Unfortunately, not as much effort went in to finding chemical weapons. Some were found, but the author believes that many stockpiles were either hidden or lost. The takeaway, ultimately, is that the Dead Hand still exists, albeit in a new mode. There is no semi-automatic nuclear weapon program.

The Cold War was mainly an ideological war. Threats of mutual destruction played a significant part during this conflict. Suffice it to mention the Berlin crises and the Cuban Missile Crisis, where humanity has almost annihilated itself. Brinkmanship was the name of the game, played in many instances by the Soviet empire. "The Dead Hand" shows to what extent all of us were living in the most dangerous period of times during the second half of the twentieth century. Its focus is to show two important and cardinal points: to what extent missiles were to make sure nobody would be alive in case the conflict grew into a hot one. The second point emphasizes and demonstrates an angle which did not get much attention by Cold War historians: the threat of biological warfare. The combination of these two destructive forces would have made Hiroshima a child's play. As Mr. Hoffman makes it clear in his riveting and breathtaking book, it would have been a matter of only some minutes when humanity could have destroyed itself. This is a story that includes presidents, advisors, soldiers, (evil) scientists, generals and spies who were working for their respective peoples in order to gain the upper hand. For the first time, we get an in-depth story about the Soviets' biological weapons program. The purpose of the Soviets was to create a genetically-engineered super-germ which would cause hundreds of millions of fatalities. He includes the story of some scientists who were working on this secret project day and night. This is his best and most fascinating part of the story. He includes stories about some scientists who could not live with lies anymore, thus they defected to the West and told the whole story about how the Russians were trying to fool the world about their intentions on biowarfare.

I bought "The Dead Hand" because for many years I believed there was more to the "Cold War" and its "end" than what we were taught or told. To be honest, I never bought into the hypothesis that

President Reagan's massive build up of the military and zest for "Star Wars" was the "cause" of the dissolution of the Soviet "evil empire". My more "I-obviously-watched-too-many-movies" side of me even thought that Gorbachev and Yeltsin would turn out to be CIA plants in what would have been the greatest single covert operation in human history. I just couldn't believe the Soviet "ending", which came on like a locomotive, could have been chalked up to death by natural causes with American military might to speed death along. No, this State had a fast-moving cancer put there by the Americans, on the inside. Well my fantasies will remain relegated to the Fiction section, but Hoffman did proceed to scare the daylights out of me with what he revealed. I won't spoil the many "a-ha's" so cleverly researched and reported on by Hoffman, but I will say that when I finished the book I shook my head in utter disbelief that the two superpowers didn't manage to destroy humanity. The scarier part is that it is possible a serious WMD threat still exists, especially in the so-called "rogue" states: Iran, North Korea, etc. OK, a little peek: given the laughable state of security around the Soviet's weapons of mass destruction at Cold War's end, even an optimist is left to conclude that the likelihood that an WMD will be used in our lifetime is inevitable, since accountability was a joke and incentives to sellout high. Hoffman's recount of Cold War history is riveting, revealing and even revolting. I fought sleep to keep reading.

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