

**Forum:** Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

**Issue:** Preventing Terrorist Acquisition and Utilization of Biological Weaponry

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, each and every species has been competing from the start of its life to the end, whether it be for food, water or shelter. Now if we condense the earth's existence to a 24-hour clock, we humans would only be here for a mere 3 seconds. However, in these 3 seconds we've done nothing but cause violence, including terrorizing one another. It is believed that the most detrimental type of terrorism is one that would cause effects which would last for decades and harm as many people as possible, in the easiest way possible. And that would be biological terrorism. At the start of these 3 seconds, we would contaminate each other's water sources and destroy one another's food sources, however it has reached levels where diseases are now spread throughout entire communities and cities, diseases that will remain for decades.

The first ever modern-day act of biological terrorism occurred in 1984 in the United States by the Rajneesh movement which was contaminating a salad bar with samples of salmonella bacteria leading to the reported illness of 751 people. Whilst it was such an easy and simple act, it affected people in ways more than imaginable and terrorized many. There have also been many cases of terrorism through the use of anthrax spores such as an attack in Japan in the 1990s and a case in 2001 which ended up killing 5 United States (US) senators. As simple as the problem seems, solving it is one of the most difficult issues to ever arise, even though many attempts have been made to prevent it. What many don't realize is that this issue may only be solved if all member states work on this together to find the root of the problem.

One of the greatest issues with biological terrorism is that some of the greatest terrorist groups such as the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) and Al Qaeda are beginning to explore the possibility of using biological weapons during terrorist attacks, as it is now easier than ever to access biological weapons, whether by buying them or finding the materials to make them. Given the immense harm caused by terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al Qaeda, it is crucial to consider the potential devastation that could result from their acquisition and use of biological weapons. The goal of preventing terrorists from obtaining and deploying such weaponry is of paramount importance and requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach.

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### *Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)<sup>1</sup>*

“A weapon of mass destruction is a nuclear, radiological, chemical, biological, or other device that is intended to harm a large number of people.”

### *Biological Terrorism*

Biological terrorism is the act of using infectious agents, harmful biological or biochemical substances as a type of weaponry for an act of terrorism, such as spreading disease through food, destroying crops and animals, contaminating water sources, etc.

### *Biological Weapons*

Biological weapons are harmful biological agents that are used as weapons, such as in wars, but mostly in terrorist attacks due to their long-lasting effects. According to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), “biological weapons disseminate disease-causing organisms or toxins to harm or kill humans, animals or plants”<sup>2</sup>.

### *Biosecurity*

The term biosecurity refers to measures and procedures specifically designed to protect the population from any weapons used in a biological terrorism attack such as biological substances and biochemicals. Some examples include maintaining cleanliness, practicing disinfection, minimizing exposure, and ensuring the traceability of animals.<sup>3</sup>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### *Definition of Bioterrorism*

Bioterrorism refers to the deliberate use or threat of biological agents, such as bacteria, viruses, or toxins, to cause harm or instill fear among populations for political, ideological, or social objectives. These biological agents can be naturally occurring or engineered, whereas their lethality varies. As a whole, the aim of bioterrorism is to instill fear, disrupt societies and achieve specific goals through the spread of disease or contamination.

### *Methods of Dissemination*

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<sup>1</sup> “Weapons of Mass Destruction | Homeland Security.” Www.dhs.gov, 1 Nov. 2022, [www.dhs.gov/topics/weapons-mass-destruction#:~:text=A%20weapon%20of%20mass%20destruction](https://www.dhs.gov/topics/weapons-mass-destruction#:~:text=A%20weapon%20of%20mass%20destruction).

<sup>2</sup> UNODA. What Are Biological Weapons? – UNODA. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/biological-weapons/about/what-are-biological-weapons/>.

<sup>3</sup> Food Safety and Preservation. “Biosecurity - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics.” Www.sciencedirect.com, 2018, [www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/biosecurity](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/biosecurity).

Given the diverse types of biological weapons, the methods of dissemination also vary. In past incidents, several ways of spreading these agents have been observed. The numerous possibilities for how terrorists might acquire and use biological weapons underscore the heightened risk for those targeted.

#### Airborne Release:

Pathogens can be released into the air, where they can be inhaled by people. This method is effective for diseases that spread through the air, like anthrax, and can lead to widespread infection.

#### Food Contamination:

Biological agents can be introduced into food, leading to large-scale outbreaks when people consume the contaminated food. An example of this is the Rajneesh cult's use of Salmonella in salad bars to cause illness.

#### Water Supply Contamination:

Introducing harmful agents into water sources can impact many people. Contaminated water can cause widespread disease outbreaks.

#### Direct Infection:

Pathogens can be introduced directly into people through injections or other methods. This approach is less common but can be used to target specific individuals.

#### Vector-Borne Transmission:

Some agents can be spread by insects or animals. Using biological agents that can be transmitted this way can spread disease over a larger area.

### ***The History of Bioterrorism***

With the ability to produce widespread illness, death, and social unrest, bioterrorism is still a major threat to the entire world. There is a long and disturbing history—dating back centuries—of biological agents being used as weapons. One of the earliest documented acts of bioterrorism dates back to 590-580 BC during the Siege of Kirrha, where the Greek general Solon poisoned the city's water supply with the toxic plant hellebore, leading to widespread illness and the eventual defeat of the city.

In the modern era, the 2001 anthrax letter attacks in the United States, which occurred shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, serve as a stark reminder of how devastating a bioterrorist assault can be, even on a small scale. In September and October 2001, envelopes containing *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax) were mailed to U.S. Senators and media organizations, resulting in

22 anthrax infections and 5 deaths. The attacks led to widespread contamination of postal facilities and required extensive decontamination efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Another notable example highlighting the dangers of bioterrorism is the 1984 Rajneesh cult incident in Oregon. The cult executed the first documented bioterror attack in the U.S. by contaminating salad bars at ten restaurants with *Salmonella Typhimurium* in an attempt to influence local elections. This led to a salmonellosis outbreak, with 751 reported cases.<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to lessen this threat, the international community has now made concentrated efforts to enhance biosecurity and biodefense capabilities.

In the meantime, worries about the possibility that malicious groups or individuals could take advantage of or worsen natural illness epidemics keep coming up. Infectious diseases can spread quickly and without warning, overwhelming health systems as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown. Disinformation campaigns, interference with response operations, and other malevolent acts are some of the ways adversaries may attempt to increase the impact of such outbreaks.

### ***Legal and Ethical Considerations***

An efficient global architecture for biodefense depends on international collaboration and governance structures. The creation and spread of biological weapons are intended to be restrained by treaties such as the Biological Weapons Convention, export control laws, and confidence-boosting initiatives. But there are still problems with enforcement and compliance, and there are still holes in the global legal and regulatory system. And in order to effectively combat bioterrorism, a wide range of stakeholders must be involved, including local communities, the corporate sector, public health organizations, and the intelligence community. Encouraging information exchange, collaborative training and drills, and public-private collaborations can improve resilience and overall readiness. Another important element is increasing public knowledge and giving people the tools they need to remain watchful and report suspicious activity.

In conclusion, preventing biological weapons from being acquired and used by terrorists necessitates a broad, proactive strategy. Enhancing global collaboration and governance, expanding biodefense capabilities, fortifying biosecurity protocols, and involving a wide range of stakeholders are all part of it. Since the bioterrorism threat landscape is always changing, it is imperative to maintain a level of heightened awareness and continual progress. Thorough examination of current patterns, weaknesses, and optimal methodologies might provide valuable insights for devising efficacious approaches to alleviate this severe and enduring risk.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

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<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Justice. Amerithrax Investigative Summary. [www.justice.gov/archive/amerithrax/docs/amx-investigative-summary2.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/archive/amerithrax/docs/amx-investigative-summary2.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> HSDL. "Rajneeshee Bioterror Attack." Homeland Security Digital Library, [www.hsdl.org/c/timeline/rajneeshee-bioterror-attack/](http://www.hsdl.org/c/timeline/rajneeshee-bioterror-attack/).

## ***United States of America (USA)***

Drawing on past experience, such as the 2001 anthrax letter attacks, the United States (US) has developed on research and initiatives to prevent future incidents. First and foremost, the United States' government has introduced programs which teach workers in these facilities on how to get rid of these hazards and potential biological weapons. These programs also teach workers how to handle biological agents, such as pathogens to prevent them spreading in the lab, which may spread to the rest of a region causing an outbreak. The United States has also begun to invest in medical infrastructure to prevent and/or decrease the effects of these biological terrorist attacks such as diagnostic technologies and an increase in research and development in prevention such as vaccinating soldiers against Anthrax and the general public against other more common diseases. The United States also started working more internationally by being one of the main leaders of the Biological Weapons Convention, and also by introducing organizations to other countries that would help in reducing bio terrorism.

## ***Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)***

In recent years, many intelligence agencies have speculated that North Korea has begun developing biological weapons. There have even been suspicions regarding their use of biological agents such as anthrax spores and smallpox since the 1960s, and there are fears that this may repeat, and has even happened in recent years. Intelligence agencies from the United States (US) and South Korea have discovered facilities that are currently handling such pathogens, yet due to the number of agreements that they have agreed to seem to have agreed to stop their use and development of such weapons. However, the lack of transparency from North Korea leads countries like the United States (US) to believe that they have not stopped such practices and should be prosecuted.

## ***Poland***

Poland has taken significant measures to counter bioterrorism, focusing on prevention, surveillance, and mitigation. Key efforts include modernizing medical infrastructures and developing robust surveillance systems to detect biological threats. Poland has established clear emergency response plans and invests in training and research to enhance preparedness. The military is crucial in this strategy, handling contamination response and integrating with civilian efforts. Additionally, Poland emphasizes collaboration within the European security system and has set up observation units and vaccination centers. These comprehensive actions reflect Poland's commitment to safeguarding public health and security against bioterrorism threats.

## ***World Health Organization (WHO)***

The World Health Organization (WHO) has gone through multiple efforts to try and prevent biological terrorism, specifically the spread of disease that may come from Anthrax spores or preventing events such as the contamination of a salad bar with Salmonella which resulted in over 700 people getting severely ill. Due to this, they created a set of legally binding rules called the International Health Regulations (IHR) in 2005. This framework mandated all member states to create infrastructure that would detect, control, report and assess biohazards and laboratories in which they are in use. The World Health Organization (WHO) also helped member states who

were unable to set this infrastructure on their own by offering financial assistance. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also made the Laboratory Biosafety Manual which helped in increasing Public Health Emergency Operations Centres (PHEOCs), which are critical when responding to health emergencies like the detection of a new unknown or unusual disease which may cause an outbreak.

***International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)***

INTERPOL plays a vital role in combating bioterrorism through various initiatives focused on prevention, preparedness, and response. Its Global Biosecurity Enhancement Programme supports member countries by increasing awareness, strengthening cooperation, and providing training. INTERPOL utilizes the BioTracker Early Warning Tool for police data management and analysis, which helps detect and respond to biological threats more effectively. The organization also conducts training and workshops to enhance law enforcement preparedness and shares expertise on biological threats. Additionally, INTERPOL collaborates internationally with organizations like WHO and UNODA and supports global law enforcement through its Bioterrorism Prevention Unit.

***United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)***

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) plays a crucial role in preventing bioterrorism through several key strategies. It enhances countries' capacity to prevent and respond to biological weapons attacks by offering training courses, tabletop exercises, and expert support. UNODA supports the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), focusing on implementing Article VII for assistance during biological attacks and promoting robust national health systems. It fosters international collaboration by facilitating information exchange and strengthening the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for investigating biological threats. Additionally, UNODA improves global preparedness by advancing crisis management strategies and enhancing detection and reporting capabilities.

**TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF EVENT</b>
1942 - 1969	The United States began their Biological Weapons program, where the research and development of such weapons began, in hopes of them being used in the Second World War.
April 10th, 1972	The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) opened for signature, prohibiting the

	development, production, and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons.
September 1984	Rajneeshee bioterror attack; 751 people suffered from food poisoning in Oregon, US
1985	The Australia Group export control regime was established to coordinate export controls on materials that could be used in biological weapons programs.
September 18th, 2001	An Anthrax attack took place in the US killing 5 people. This increased security when it came to bioterrorism, so this would not happen again.
April 28th, 2004	The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 was adopted, requiring all UN member states to take measures to prevent terrorists and non-state actors from acquiring biological weapons and related materials.
May 23rd, 2005	The International Health Regulations (IHR) were adopted by the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly,
February 13th, 2014	The global Health Security Agenda (GHSa) was established. Its aim is to detect, prevent and respond to possible biological terrorism threats.

## RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### *United Nations Security Council resolution 1540, 2004<sup>6</sup>*

In resolution 1540, adopted in 2004, the Security Council decided that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and

<sup>6</sup> Official Document System - UN, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n04/328/43/pdf/n0432843.pdf>.

their means of delivery, in particular for terrorist purposes. The resolution requires all States to adopt and enforce appropriate laws to this effect as well as other effective measures to prevent the proliferation of these weapons and their means of delivery to non-State actors, in particular for terrorist purposes. It was implemented soon after its adoption in 2005.

### ***WHO International Health Regulations, 2005***<sup>7</sup>

The International Health Regulations (IHR) established a global framework for strengthening disease surveillance, reporting, and response capabilities to address public health emergencies of international concern, including those that may be linked to bioterrorism. This will decrease biological terrorism attacks and will help in preventing the acquisition and utilization of biological agents in terrorism.

### ***United Nations Security Council Resolution 2325, 2016***<sup>8</sup>

Resolution 2325 aims at creating a framework to ensure that terrorists and non-state actors do not have access to any Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). These Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) include biological weapons, which will thus prevent the acquisition of these weapons by terrorists, thus causing them not to be used in the first place. Whilst it also directly decreased the threat of biological weapons, it also aimed to reaffirm the terms of the original resolution of the United Nations Security Council 1540, agreed upon in 2004.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

### ***Biological Weapon Convention (BWC)***<sup>9</sup>

The Biological Weapon Convention (BWC) of 1972 was one of the first events that led to the combating of biological terrorism, and use of biological weapons in general. The aim of this treaty was to completely ban and allow the prosecution of individuals who develop or use any form of biological weapons such as voluntarily spreading disease such as anthrax spores or spreading diseases through water sources. Now, any individuals who use such methods are to be prosecuted and criminalized and may face severe punishment.

### ***G7 Biological Security Working Group***<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> FIFTY-EIGHTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY. *Revision of the International Health Regulations*. [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA58/WHA58\\_3-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA58/WHA58_3-en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Official Document System - UN, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n16/442/57/pdf/n1644257.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. [www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.37\\_conv%20biological%20weapons.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.37_conv%20biological%20weapons.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> "Home." Wwww.gpwmd.com, [www.gpwmd.com/](http://www.gpwmd.com/).

The G7 Biological Security Working Group (BSWG) is a collaborative effort among the Group of Seven (G7) nations to enhance global biological security and counter biological threats, including bioterrorism and naturally occurring infectious diseases. Established to address the growing concerns over the misuse of biological agents, the BSWG focuses on improving biosecurity measures, enhancing disease surveillance and detection capabilities, and fostering international cooperation in the field of biological research and response. The group works on developing and implementing best practices for handling biological materials, promoting transparency and information sharing among member states, and coordinating efforts to strengthen global health security.

### ***Australia Group Export Control Regime<sup>11</sup>***

The Australia Group is a multilateral export control regime established in 1985 to prevent the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. It coordinates export controls on chemical and biological agents, as well as related equipment and technologies, to ensure they are not used in weapons, thus decreasing overall terrorism. As of today, over 40 countries are involved, some of them being France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### ***Enhancing Infrastructure and Surveillance***

Currently, there is a significant lack of infrastructure for the surveillance of facilities that work with biohazards such as Anthrax, which has allowed terrorists to access and misuse these dangerous substances easily. To address this, it is essential to increase the research and development of medical countermeasures. These efforts will enable authorities to react effectively to such attacks and implement appropriate measures when facilities unlawfully dispose of pathogens and biological hazards. Potential actions include shutting down the laboratory or placing the area under quarantine.

### ***Strengthening Security Measures***

Improving security measures is another critical step in preventing the misuse of biohazards. This can involve prohibiting the entrance of unauthorized items such as food or medicines into these facilities. Additionally, preventing certain species of plants and animals from entering areas with biohazard risks is essential, as these species could cause severe damage later on. This approach is already being implemented in customs procedures, such as those at JFK Airport in New York, United States.

### ***Addressing the Root Causes of Terrorism***

While direct prevention of bioterrorism is crucial, it is equally important to address the root causes of terrorism, including radicalism and political motivation. Understanding that these

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<sup>11</sup> *World Trade Organization - Global Trade*,  
[www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/int\\_exp\\_regs\\_part3\\_4\\_e.pdf](http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/int_exp_regs_part3_4_e.pdf).

attacks, though perpetrated by terrorist groups, may be encouraged by member states, highlights the need for international cooperation. Countries must work together to prevent proxy wars that could lead to bioterrorism and to ensure that terrorist groups do not gain access to biological weapons.

### ***Enhancing International Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing***

To effectively combat bioterrorism, countries should start sharing intelligence with one another and improve the global response to such threats. By notifying each other as soon as possible in the event of a bioterrorism threat or attack, the impact on the public can be minimized, and the risk posed by biological hazards can be reduced. Implementing laws and strategies to prevent bioterrorism attacks can be achieved through international meetings and collaboration.

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