

**Committee:** Disarmament and International Security

**Question:** The Question of Biological Weapons

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## Introduction:

The use of biological weapons dates back thousands of years and they are mainly use for harming, incapacitating or killing intended targets. Furthermore, biological weapons bring on diseases that threaten human lives, leading to a great number of deaths caused by illnesses which cannot be cured.

A biological weapon is an attractive weapon because biological agents are relatively easy and inexpensive to obtain, they can be easily disseminated, and can cause widespread fear and panic worldwide. Military leaders have learned that bioterrorism has some important limitations, for instance, it is quite difficult to employ a bioweapon without affecting friendly forces instead of causing the enemy damage. A biological weapon is useful to terrorists mainly as a method of creating disruption to a state or a country. That is the main reason why this issue can not be solved by one nation, all member states must collaborate in order to reach a fruitful solution.

## Key terms:

**BTWC:** The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction was the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning the production of an entire category of weapons.

**Biological Warfare:** Biological warfare (BW) also known as Herman warfare is the use of biological toxins or infectious agents such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi with the intent to kill or incapacitate humans, animals or plants.

**Bio-weapons:** Biological weapon, also called germ weapon, can be defined as any of a number of disease-producing agents such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, toxins, or other biological agents that may be used as weapons against humans, animals, or plants.

**Pathogens:** Pathogens are microorganisms that can cause disease.

**Stockpiling:** A supply stored for future use, usually carefully accrued and maintained.

**Bioterrorism:** when biological weapons are used illegally to harm other human beings.

**Biological agent:** a bacterium, virus, protozoan, parasite, or fungus that can be used purposefully as a weapon in bioterrorism or biological warfare (BW).

**Anthrax:** Anthrax is an infection caused by the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*.

**Smallpox:** Smallpox was an infectious disease caused by either of two virus variants, *Variola major* and *Variola minor*

## The issue:

In biological warfare bacteria or viruses are introduced into an environment for hostile purposes, that is not prepared to defend itself from the intruder.

Biological weapons may be employed in various ways to gain a strategic or tactical advantage over the enemy, either by threats or by actual deployments. Biological weapons may also be useful as area denial weapons. These agents may be lethal or non-lethal, and may be targeted against a single individual, a group of people, or even an entire population. They may be developed, acquired, stockpiled or deployed by nation states or by non-national groups. If a nation-state uses it clandestinely, it may be considered as bioterrorism.

When compared to the cost of a nuclear weapons program, biological weapons are extremely cheap. Moreover, it is estimated that a gram of toxin could kill ten million people.

Any nation with a reasonably advanced pharmaceutical and medical industry has the capability of mass producing biological weapons. This fact also leads to problems with determining what countries have programs.

A seed culture of anthrax bacteria could be grown to mass quantities in around 96 hours. The level of technology needed to do this kind of work is also much lower when compared to nuclear weapons. Most of the techniques used can be found in the textbooks and journals available worldwide.

There are some countries who are currently suspected of having biological weapons programs which are: Canada, China, Cuba, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Libya, North Korea, Russia, South Africa, Syria, the United Kingdom and the United States. Most of these countries are members of the BWC but we can not know if they are complying with their commitments.

## Regional positions:

**United States of America:** the USA has been one of the states that have developed biological weapons from the beginning. This country created its first biological weapon research program in 1945. They made very important tests which unfortunately had unexpected consequences, for example, the spraying of biological agents over San Francisco. Those incidents lead President Nixon to put an end to the research conducted under this program. The USA have secretly continued BW research until 2003, avoiding any restriction by the Biological Weapon Convention.

**United Kingdom:** the UK was also in possession of biological weapons in the past; it actually established the Microbiological Research Department 1947, which was also expanded in 1951. Many tests were also conducted in the Bahamas, in the Isles of Lewis and in Scottish waters. In 1957 the government decided to abandon their plans for biological weapons, destroy their stockpiles and adopt a biological weapon defensive strategy.

**Japan:** Japan was the first state to develop biological weapons, having a very long history on this topic. In 1925, Japan refused to sign the Geneva Convention banning biological weapons and conducting experiments in Manchuria in 1932 causing damage to its environment. Following World War II, Japan created Unit 731, a research program about chemical and biological weapons and their effects on living organisms. In 1945, Japanese troops demolished the headquarters of Unit 731. About 3000 people died due to experiments conducted by Unit 731. Japan is still researching this topic

**Russian Federation:** the Russian Federation is the country that has been constantly involved in biological weapons issues, Russia also created a research program and as a result of those tests a huge accident of an outbreak of pulmonary anthrax took place in Sverdlovsk, in the Soviet Union in 1979. Furthermore, the Soviet Union signed the BWTC in 1972 and ratified it in 1975, following its entry into pharmaceutical and bio-technological sector, while possessing infrastructure and expertise that could be applied to develop a biological warfare program.

**Iraq:** Iraq has been highly affected by biological weapons. Iraq has also created a biological weapons research program from 1973 to 1991. Between 1985 and 1991 Iraq developed an offensive biological weapons capability including anthrax, toxins and others. Today, Iraq is more of a victim from biological weapons and not a nation producing them. Since Iraq constitutes one of the main countries of action of the rifest terrorism organization at the moment one could easily say that Iraq is being highly threatened by bioterrorism.

## Biological Weapons Convention (BTWC)

The Convention came into force in March 1975, following the ratification of 22 governments. Nine months after the treaty's entry into force all such material had to be destroyed. It is a huge success to mention that the BWTC now has 163 member states and 110 signatories, and that seven review conferences have taken place so far.

## Key events:

Event/date	Explanation
Sixth century B.C.	The Assyrians poisoned their enemies with a fungus that would leave them delirious
1346	The bodies of Mongol warriors of the Golden Horde who died of plague were thrown over the walls of Kaffa and specialists think that this operation may have been the responsible for the spread of the Black Death into Europe.
1710	Russian troops allegedly use plague-infected corpses against Swedes.
1763	The British Army used smallpox against Native Americans during the Siege of Fort Pitt.
1900	The germ theory and advances in bacteriology brought a new level of sophistication to the techniques for possible use of bio-agents in war.
World War I	Biological sabotage in form of anthrax and glanders was undertaken on behalf of the Imperial German government.
1925	The Geneva Protocol prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons.
Nomonhan Incident (1939)	Japanese poisoned Soviet water supply with intestinal typhoid bacteria at former Mongolian border. This was the first use of biological weapons by Japan.
1940	Japanese army Air Force bombed Ningbo with ceramic bombs full of fleas carrying bubonic plague.

1979	Outbreak of pulmonary anthrax in Sverdlovsk, Soviet Union.
2011	165 countries had signed the treaty and non are proven — though nine are still suspected— to posses offensive BW programs

## Relevant UN treaties and documents:

- Resolution A/RES/33/59 (1978): this resolution urged Russia and the United States of America to submit a joint initiative towards the elimination of chemical and biological weapons and called the member states to sign and ratify the Geneva Protocol and the Biological Weapons Convention.
- Resolution (8<sup>th</sup> November 2002): this resolution offers Iraq under Saddam Hussein a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations that had been set out in several previous resolutions.
- Resolution A/RES/59/466 (2004): this resolution recalled the decision of the Fifth Review Conference to enact penal legislation, and national mechanisms to establish and maintain the security and oversight of pathogenic micro-organisms and toxins.
- Resolution 1540 (2004): this resolution Requested that all states should refrain from providing any form of support to non-state actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport and transfer biological weapons in particular for terrorist purposes.
- Resolution 2235 (16<sup>th</sup> December 2016): this resolution calls for a framework to keep terrorists, other non-states actors from acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue:

The stockpiling and development of biological weapons have been discussed since 1907 when the Hague Convention was signed. Although this issue has been discussed since 1907 a solution was not reached until the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, usually called the Geneva Protocol, was signed in 1925. This protocol, speaking in its personal capacity, bans the utilization of any biological weapons or chemical weapons. Nevertheless, this treaty did not prohibit the production, development and stockpiling of this type of weapons.

What is more, the interest of the topic in the end of the 1960s lead to the creation of the Biological Weapons and Toxin Weapons a Convention in 1972, which entered into force in 1975. This Convention has already been explained.

On 27 June 2002, during the 2002 Summit, the G8 issued a statement outlining a new initiative, entitled the “Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction” . Moreover, throughout the Summits, G8 leaders met and produce statements, declarations and Action Plans to strengthen the nonproliferation regime.

Up to 2014, the G8 decided to establish a senior-level mechanism to coordinate Global Partnership activities, including monitoring progress and identifying priorities.

## Possible solutions:

These are ones of the solutions that may be needed in order to solve this issue:

- One of the most effective solutions could be renewing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.
- With the aim of updating the the existing Convention, amendments should be made. One of this amendments could be, for instance, punishing the states who violate this Convention.
- Moreover, states ought to invest money to introduce more treaties and conventions concerning this topic.
- Every nation should create a biological weapons defensive program so that they are capable of protecting their citizens from bioterrorism.
- The UN should establish programs for detection of Biological Weapons in order to know which countries posses this type of mass destruction weapons.

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