



Forum:	Student Officers
Issue:	Evaluating the current threat of biological weapons
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Description of the issue:

Biological weapons are disease-producing agents, such as bacteria, viruses, fungi etc. which can be used against opposing enemies in wars, such as World War 1. In today's society, medicine and health care in various countries are very well developed and stable. Existing medicine and vaccines are used to cure or at least fight the caused disease. But still, biological weapons represent a huge threat to the world population and its peace. There are several reasons for that. At first, sticking to health care systems, many LEDCs and even MEDCs do not possess such stable health care systems, meaning that there are already existing health care problems, so the country could not deal with outbreaks of diseases (e.g. Covid-19), especially not if there is any war going on in the country. Second reason is the "invisibility" of biological weapons (bw), at least for a certain period. An attack with a BW will most certainly stay undetected for hours or days before there is a huge outbreak of diseases causing the health care systems, if stable or not, to crash and most importantly, causing tremendous numbers of deaths. In the United Nations this has been an issue for decades. There have been several treaties forbidding the production and use of BWs, but still, there are countries involved in the UN which do not obey to these treaties. This will also be part of the debates.

Background information:

Biological weapons represent one of the biggest threads to the world's population. Biological warfare is defined as the act of deliberately spreading deadly biological agents such as fungi, toxins and viruses between human, animals, and plants. BWs, as it has been the case in past wars,



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can have tremendous consequences. One reason why they represent such a big threat is their cheap manufacturing process. It costs about 2000 dollars to destroy one km² if conventional weapons are used. If nuclear weapons are used, the costs come to about 800 dollars and for nerve gas, it costs about 600\$. If a party in a war used a biological weapon in order to destroy one km² it would only cost them one single \$. Therefore, BWs are in some cases called “Bombs of the poor”. As the first reason has been stated, why the BWs represent such a big threat to our society, they are also easier to manufacture and extremely lethal. One gram of toxin can kill over 10 million people. BWs are often awfully hard to detect. Before the disease infiltrates the body in many cases it can not be felt.

In contrast to the named reasons, the process of turning a biological agent into an effective weapon is relatively expensive. For example, if a missile (biological weapon) flies through the atmosphere, its hot surrounding is deadly for the biological agent and therefore some measures need to be taken. In order to store biological weapons, again it takes complex processes due to the rapid decomposition of many materials.

Most common BWs

The first of the most used BW in past wars or conflicts is anthrax. Its spores can be naturally found in soil or produced in the laboratory. It is easy to store and lasts for over 50 years. Another common biological weapon is botulinum toxin, also known as Botox. One gram of botulinum toxin can kill over a million people. In addition to its lethality, it is also easy to produce. Naturally these bacteria can be found in the soil of lakes, streams and forests. It is possible to distribute it through the air or through water (lakes, rivers). An infection with botulinum toxin, it leads to poisoning that paralyzes the muscles.

Last but not least, Ebola Virus. It is a well-known disease, first discovered in the DPRK where it was transmitted from wild animals to humans. It is a deadly disease which can hardly but possibly be used as a BW.

Bioterrorism

Since it is on one hand cheap and on the other hand compared to other weapon systems easy to develop BWs, Bioterrorism could become a huge threat to our society. In the past there have been several Bioterror attacks with anthrax and Salmonella bacteria (view “Historical Background”). By using BWs, it would become easier for the terrorist groups to gain power over certain areas and kill a huge number of people.

Defensive measures



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Like the ongoing global pandemic right now, BWs spread through aerosols, which is why it is effective to wear a protecting face mask with filters in addition to protective overgarments in order to prevent the biological agents to come in touch with breaks in the skin or open wounds. Another necessary measure is the development of biological weapon sensors that trigger an alarm in order for the affected population to arrange certain measures.

Of course, the defensive measure number one in every country should be/ is the health care system, including medical facilities and vaccine researching. Vaccines against anthrax and smallpox, two of the most lethal BWs have been tested and approved but not every disease caused by a biological weapon attack can be healed yet which is why nations are still developing and researching continuously.

An example for more safety measures is the USA. They have created “push packages” which are stored all over the country and include vaccines, medicines, decontamination agents and emergency medical equipment. The USA also has bioterrorism response plans which include plans for mass vaccinations and quarantines.

Historical background:

Biological Weapons, such as fungi, viruses and bacteria have not been used commonly in the past wars. Still biological weapons, not necessarily named as such, have been part of some conflicts and wars in the history of our world. There are reports of enemy parties in the 13th and 14th century who started to throw contaminated bodies over walls of cities or fortresses. That way they caused an epidemic in the fortress, which on the one hand forced the enemies to leave their fortress or on the other hand led to the death of the enemy parties.

World War I

WWI is known for the common use of gases, such as chlorine gas or mustard gas. Nevertheless, some biological weapon was also used by Germany. During the First World War, Germany tried to infect horses and cattle owned by the Allied armies in order to cause diseases and an epidemic. There are reports of the use of glanders.

In addition to that, in 1915 Germany made an attempt to spread the plague in St. Petersburg so the Russian army would be weakened.

1925 Geneva Protocol



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The traumatizing circumstances of WWI caused most countries of the world to sign this contract which prohibited biological (and chemical) weapons. Signed on the 17 June 1925, it entered into force on 8 February 1928.

Although it was signed by Japan, too, the nation violated the treaty by continuing to research on biological weapons, producing, and developing them.

World War II

During WWII, Japan used biological weapons against China and experimented with them. Testing and researching on e.g., anthrax, typhus, smallpox, yellow fever, tularemia, hepatitis, cholera, gas gangrene, and glanders, Japan killed over 3000 prisoners of war and other people.

In addition to that it can not be said that Japan was the only nation violating the 1925 Geneva Protocol in WWII but there is no existing evidence of such actions. Nevertheless, it was generally assumed that the United Kingdom, Germany, the Soviet Union and the USA had so called R&D programs in order to research on biological weapons.

Cold War

During the Cold War both sides, the Soviet Union and the USA continued R&D programs on BWs violating the treaties signed by both enemy parties.

Biological Weapons Convention

This international treaty, formally “Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction” banned on one the hand again the use of BWs in warfare, but also ultimately banned their development, production, acquisition, stockpiling or transfer.

One “failed” aspect of the treaty is the missing verification method of the members’ compliance. That missing method is one reason why many nations could continue R&D programs on BWs in the ongoing Cold War until today.

Bio Terrorism

Until today, BWs have been used by terrorist organizations in some cases. In the 1980s, a group named “Rajneeshies” tried to gain control over the city The Dalles and succeeded in gaining political control over the area. After that, they experimented with the water supply of The Dalles by putting Salmonella bacteria in it. The effort made 751 people ill.

Terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda have also shown interest in developing BWs which they have done in an anthrax laboratory in Afghanistan, until it was overrun by U.S. and Afghan forces in 2001.



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In addition to that in 2001 there were letters in New York who were anthrax-laden and sent to prominent individuals and politicians. The attacks killed 5 people and 22 had to go to the hospital. Billions of dollars were lost in cleanup, investigation, and decontamination.

Glossary:

BWs: Biological Weapons

R&D (programs): **R**esearch & **D**evelopment, in this case on and of BWs

How to prepare as a delegate:

In order to debate on this issue, all delegates should be aware of the urgency of evaluating the current threat of biological weapons and finding measures against them ~~as a threat~~.

The delegates need to be informed about their countries' current situation/status, including social, economic and political aspects, as well as about the national policy.

More specific, all delegations shall be aware of the influence, they may or may not have on this issue, and need to know about initiatives and laws established by the governments, as well as various IGOS and NGOs tackling the threat portrayed by biological weapons.

In addition, you may consider the following questions during your research:

-Is my country in compliance with the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the Biological Weapons Convention?

-If yes, did my country violate them (reportedly)?

-Are there any emergency defensive measures my country has developed or is developing?

-Is my country currently researching on BWs?

All delegates are required to write at least one draft resolution and two position papers so that all topics of the forum are covered. Concerning the draft resolution:

focus on writing OCs calling for concrete action to take, in order to solve the issue.

The deadline to send in the documents is the 03.09.2021.

All documents sent in after the deadline will not be corrected by me as a Student Officer.

We might implement further restrictions if we feel it is necessary, like expelling unprepared delegates from lobbying.



UN resolutions:

-A/RES/67/35

Measures to uphold the authority of the 1925 Geneva Protocol

This resolution aims at preventing the violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925

-A/RES/38/187

Chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons

This resolution deals with the issue of BWs by prohibiting them

-A/C.1/53/L.6

Status of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

Aims at including all nations in the Convention named in order to make it successful

-A/RES/2662(XXV)

Question of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons

Addresses the issue of BWs and their threat to the world

Useful links:

1. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9800098/>

This website gives a brief and good overview over the current threat of BWs.

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_warfare

Detailed explanation of Biological Warfare.

3. <https://news.stanford.edu/pr/01/bioterror117.html>

Good overview over the topic BWs

4. <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/BIO-survey-final-report.pdf>

A survey regarding the nonproliferation of BWs

5. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/biological-weapons/>

Good overview over the Biological Weapons Convention

6. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/08/1017352>

News on the evaluation of the threat of BWs regarding terrorist group



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Sources:

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<https://www.britannica.com/event/Biological-Weapons-Convention>

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/bio/1925-geneva-protocol/>

<https://treaties.unoda.org/t/1925>

https://www.who.int/health-topics/biological-weapons#tab=tab_1