



## DISEC: Topic #2

# Preparation for the weaponization of pathogens

### **Background:**

Weaponized pathogens have long been a fear of many military and government officials, in 1925 Churchill called public attention to it “Blight to destroy crops, Anthrax to slay horses and cattle, Plague to poison not armies only but whole districts—such are the lines along which military science is remorselessly advancing,” he complained. However, despite their devastating potential and the amount of research put into them, up until today their use remains quite limited. Weaponized pathogens are no doubt dangerous, but they’re also cheap and easy to produce, for example, the pathogen that causes anthrax can be found in nature, it doesn’t even require a lab. Furthermore, weaponized pathogens also offer deniability, attacks can look like natural outbreaks, and are therefore difficult to attribute. The greatest factor that has led to the limited use of weaponized pathogens has been the difficulty of deploying them on a large scale: unpredictable winds, changing terrain, or incorrect dosage could all lead to failure. According to Carus, the United States and the Soviet Union are the only two countries believed to have overcome such challenges enough to be capable of using aerosol releases to reliably disseminate biological weapons over a large area.

### **Current Situation:**

At this point everyone on the globe is familiar with how devastating a virus outbreak can be. And weaponized pathogens are far from a lost experiment from the past. With the rise of gene-editing methods the likes of CRISPR, nations could develop novel or modified pathogens that would spread more quickly, infect more people, cause more severe sickness, or resist treatment more fully. Equipment needed for wide-area dispersal may become less necessary, for example, if a pathogen can be engineered to spread faster on its own. However, up until now countries have not revitalized or started new biological weapons programs, openly. This can be attributed to the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, which bans the development, stockpiling, acquisition, retention, and production of biological agents for non peaceful purposes. Although the treaty is often criticized for its lack of a meaningful enforcement mechanism, it has helped establish a global norm that using biological weapons is immoral and unacceptable. Although such norms may not constrain the worst actors’ behavior, they do provide the rationale and motivation for the rest of the world to punish violators. (Charlet)

### **Important bloc positions:**

As in all political issues the rift created by the cold war is still apparent, so the US will stick more to it’s NATO allies and the western bloc, while Russia and China will stick more to their eastern bloc allies.

Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria:

- These countries were all named directly by the U.S. as being in non-compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention (Rissanen).
- None of them have officially disclosed a biological weapons program



**Possible solutions:**

- Promotion of universal membership of the BWC,
- Greater efforts in disease surveillance, detection, and diagnosis and countering infectious diseases,
- Greater control of access to dangerous pathogens and toxins,
- Codes of conduct for scientists,
- Oversight of genetic engineering and high-risk scientific experiments,
- National legislation to criminalize the acquisition and possession of biological weapons and extradition of violators or an international Convention on Criminalization of Chemical and Biological Weapons,
- Revision of existing CBMs and the establishment of new ones,
- Investigations into non-compliance,
- Annual meetings of member states, and
- Establishment of a scientific advisory panel.

**Further reading:**

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/deliberate-weaponisation-of-pathogens-big-concern-need-to-develop-bio-defence-nsa-ajit-doval-101635443929268.html>  
<https://www.un.org/disarmament/biological-weapons/>  
<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/gadis3666.doc.htm>  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/4235718?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4235718?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

**Bibliography:**

- Charlet, Katherine. "The New Killer Pathogens: Countering The Coming Bioweapons Threat". Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/04/17/new-killer-pathogens-countering-coming-bioweapons-threat-pub-76009>.
- Rissanen, Jenni. "The Biological Weapons Convention - The Nuclear Threat Initiative". The Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2003, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/biological-weapons-convention/>.