

## Topic: Biological Weapons

The threat of biological weapons is not new. Evidence of the weaponization of biological agents can be traced back to the year 1346, when the Mongols catapulted corpses contaminated with plague over the walls of Kaffa to fend off invading enemies.<sup>1</sup> Some argue that the first use of such weapons occurred even earlier than this, claiming that the ancient Greeks first introduced the concept of bioweapons within the tale of Hercules in which the mythological hero dips his sword into the toxic blood of the Hydra.<sup>2</sup> Despite their early roots, biological weapons remain a contemporary issue and threat to global security. More modern examples of biological attacks include the attempt by German soldiers during World War I to infect livestock being shipped to the Allied forces, and the 2001 Anthrax attack on the United States (“Amerithrax”).<sup>3</sup>

The World Health Organization defines biological weapons as “microorganisms like virus, bacteria, fungi, or other toxins that are produced and released deliberately to cause disease and death in humans, animals or plants.”<sup>4</sup> These substances can cause large numbers of fatalities in a short amount of time while being difficult to contain, and could also result in an epidemic.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding these potential risks, the global community has worked for many years to control and track the proliferation of biological weapons. The initial framework for this international effort was created after World War I through the *Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare*, also referred to as the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The Protocol was signed at a conference in Geneva held under the auspices of the League of Nations and prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons.<sup>6</sup> In 1975, the *Biological Weapons Convention* (BWC) was adopted by the United Nations and reinforced the goals set forth by the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The BWC has since served as the guiding document on the issue of biological weaponry, and it is considered a legally binding treaty.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/biological-weapons-convention/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://globalbiodefense.com/2014/05/20/bioterrorism-roadblocks-facing-non-state-actors-use-of-bioweapons/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/biological-weapons-convention/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.who.int/health-topics/biological-weapons#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/biological-weapons#tab=tab_1)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/bio/1925-geneva-protocol/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/bwc>

Although the BWC represents the international community's desire to prevent biological warfare, it has faced many challenges in its implementation.<sup>8</sup> Critics of the Convention note that in addition to other shortcomings, the treaty lacks universality, as well proper verification methods.<sup>9</sup> Also, a number of member states have flagrantly disregarded the provisions of the BWC with little consequence.

Despite the advances made with the BWC, the threat of biological weapons continues to loom large. This is especially true in regard to non-state actors obtaining bioweapons, an issue for which a comprehensive solution has yet to be found.

Delegates of DISEC are tasked with finding a way to better ensure the security of the global community against this danger as it relates to disarmament and security. Please consider:

- Do the protective mechanisms provided for by the Biological Weapons Convention provide adequate protection against the threat of biological weapons? If not, can they be improved upon, or must a new resolution be adopted?
- How can countries who have not signed the BWC be convinced to do so?
- What should be the correct international response to a biological attack?
- What measures can be put in place to prevent terrorists from obtaining biological weapons?

Please keep in mind that you are representing your country's views, not your own. In addition, all papers will be submitted through Turnitin, so please do not plagiarize!

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at [adauerba@mail.yu.edu](mailto:adauerba@mail.yu.edu). I am looking forward to reading your work.

Best of luck,  
Adam Auerbach  
Chair, Disarmament and International Security Committee  
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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/biological-weapons-convention/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid