

Committee: DISEC

Topic: Biological Warfare



Report of the Chairs

Theme of the Conference:

Last year, at Austin High’s inaugural conference, we challenged delegates to “compromise and collaborate” in order to come to equitable solutions. While our topics were of great nuance, they offered little complexity when it came to negotiation itself. The current roster of topics is thematically centered around the overcoming of this simplicity, including topics of debate that require successful delegates to not only understand relevant content and their national perspective but that they apply heightened diplomatic skills. A simple compromise that allows two sides of a debate to meet in the middle becomes problematic with topics like euthanasia or intellectual property theft. Creativity, as well as a willingness to negotiate from new angles, will be required if acceptable, or novel, solutions are to be found.

As delegates, we believe you will find, both through the deliberate encouragement of the chairs and execution of our background guides, that our topics this year will elevate debate beyond simple compromise.

I. Rationale

In recent decades, biological warfare has become an increasingly pertinent threat to the global community. From terrorist cells to dictatorial countries, a greater variety of groups than ever before have the ability to employ biowarfare tactics. Cost, relative ease of production compared to conventional weapons, advancing technology, discreteness, and poor public health infrastructure all contribute to biological weapons becoming an alluring prospect. The world is fundamentally unprepared for a large scale biological attack; it is of utmost importance that we internationally become better equipped to handle prospective threats. Delegates are encouraged to look at all aspects of the issue including preventative defensive measures, counter-offensive measures, as well as the current state and extensive history of applied offensive measures.

II. Background of the Topic

Contagion warfare was “invented” during the siege of Caffa, in 1346. The invading forces initiated the siege during an epidemic of plague and used this to their advantage in an ingenious tactical decision that would forever change warfare. The attackers hurled infected bodies over the walls of the fortified city, sparking an epidemic that decimated defenders. This simple tactic was repeated with varying success numerous times throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. In 1710, infected bodies were used to weaken the enemy in the battle between Russian forces and Swedish troops in Reval. In 1797, Napoleon flooded the plains around Mantua, Italy in order to increase the spread of malaria in the opposing forces. The Confederates sold smallpox infected clothing to the Union during the US Civil War (“Biological Weapons – UNODA”).

The specter of industrial biowarfare reared its head in World War II as chemical warfare did in the first, both with the Japanese Imperial Army’s construction of Unit 731 and the medical experiments of the Holocaust. Unit 731 was focused on the research and creation of biological weapons, which were tested on human subjects. At the time, Unit 731 was the biggest biowarfare program in the world. The death toll in Unit 731 is estimated to range anywhere from 200,000 to 580,000 people, most of whom were Chinese (“*UNIT 731*”).

After World War II and throughout the mid 20th century many countries began their own biological warfare programs, most notably, the United States, Soviet Union, Canada, Britain, and France (“Country Profiles”). In 1969, Britain submitted a proposal to the UN committee of disarmament detailing the need for bio-warfare prohibition. Subsequently, the “Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction” or BWC was developed in 1972. The BWC was later ratified in 1975, however, it lacks firm guidelines for inspections and control of disarmament as well as no enforcement on how to deal with such violations. Despite the efforts of the BWC, many signatories participated in activities outlawed by the convention. The number and identity of countries who partook in offensive biowarfare research is still largely classified

information. The number of these programs has increased during the past 30 years ("Biological Weapons – UNODA").

In 1978, an exile of Bulgaria named Georgi Markov was assassinated in London via a biological weapon disguised as an umbrella. Georgi died 3 days after a pellet fired from the umbrella had entered his leg. The pellet was revealed to have contained the toxin ricin. The assassination was carried out by the Bulgarian secret service with technology supplied by the Soviet Union. In 1979 an anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk, Russia confirmed the suspicion of bio-warfare facilities existing in Russia. However, these claims were denied by Russia until 1992 when Russian President Boris Yeltsin admitted that the Sverdlovsk facility had been used for offensive biological weapons research. A report in 1995 stated that the program continued to exist after 1979, and harbored nearly 30,000 employees. Research continued and Russia was able to weaponize smallpox and pure anthrax. The research was conducted remotely in Siberian facilities and very little is known about the extent of the research. In 1991, after the end of the Persian Gulf War, Iraq told UN Special Commissions Team 7 that offensive bio-weapons programs existed and extensive research was done. However, the UN struggled to enforce the BWC and recent developments in Iraq point toward the development of new biological weapons ("Biological Weapons – UNODA").

In addition to these state-led research programs, civilian terrorist groups have consistently shown the ease of use with which bio-weapons can be used. In 1984, in Oregon, the Rajneeshee cult contaminated salad bars and a total of 751 severe enteritis cases were reported. In 1995, the Aum Shinrikyo cult attacked a Tokyo subway station with sarin gas. Allegedly the cult had attempted three unsuccessful biological attacks prior to using anthrax, and botulinum toxin. It was also found that a cult member tried to acquire the Ebola Zaire virus in 1992. Only small portions of the Aum Shinrikyo's biological warfare program was uncovered, and presently, details remain unknown. In the aftermath of the World Trade Center attack in 2001, several letters containing anthrax were mailed around the US causing panic and paranoia along with casualties (Riedel, Stefan).

Biological weapons are unpredictable and tear through the fabric of social and economic activity, crippling the government's authority and causing wide hysteria.

In Syria, Bashar al-Assad is waging a biological war on his citizens. Assad is purposely withholding vaccines and modern medicine from the citizens he deems as non-loyal. Assad has contaminated water sources and blocked humanitarian aid from helping regions fraught with epidemics. Polio, which was eradicated from Syria in 1995, resurfaced in 2013 in Deir Ezzor, a “non-loyal” region (Sparrow, Annie). Assad is leading a biological assault simply by neglect, and he is not the only one. It is speculated that Canada, China, Cuba, as well as France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Libya, North Korea, Russia, South Africa, Syria, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States all have and could use biological weapons (“Biological Weapons – UNODA”).

III. Directive

The regulations regarding bioweapons are hazy at most. Many countries who ratified the BWC have been stated to conduct research in direct opposition to the BWC due to the framework and the legal upholding being rather weak. Currently, our international body has no effective way of governing bioweapons and the numerous threats that accompany it. It is up to this committee to find resolutions fit to handle all aspects regarding biowarfare. Delegates should keep in mind issues of bioterrorism, and warring nations using biowarfare to their advantage. It is also important that defensive measures are explored, the security of our nations stands above all else.

IV. Important Terminology

Biological Weapons: a harmful biological agent (such as a pathogenic microorganism or a neurotoxin) used as a weapon to cause death or disease usually on a large scale.

V. Note to the Delegates

We are beyond excited about this room, and we are always willing to answer any questions you may have! We are looking forward to seeing you all at AUSMUN!

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VI. Delegations

Canada

China

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Israel
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North Korea
Russia
South Africa
Syria
United Kingdom
The United States
India
Pakistan
Egypt
Nigeria
Singapore
Yemen
Serbia
Croatia
Saudi Arabia

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