



Identification, Characterization, and Attribution of Biological Weapons Use

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I. Introduction

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you today about a topic of great interest to myself, Under Secretary of State Joseph, Secretary Rice, and the President: the challenges associated with investigating allegations of biological weapons use, identifying agents, and making an attribution assessment.

II. VCI

As Assistant Secretary of State for Verification, Compliance, and Implementation (VCI), I am responsible for taking the lead role within the U.S. Government in determining states' compliance under a variety of arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament treaties, agreements, and commitments. This includes, most prominently, preparing the President's congressionally mandated annual report to Congress on "Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments", commonly called the "Noncompliance Report." The report lays out findings of the United States regarding questions of noncompliance by other nations, alerting the U.S. Government and public to both existing noncompliance and potential compliance concerns. The report, the unclassified version of which is available to all interested parties on the State Department's website, provides in as much detail as possible the evidence and reasoning behind our compliance judgments.

Specific to biological weapons (BW), the Verification, Compliance, and Implementation Bureau has three primary responsibilities. First, we are responsible for assessing other nations' compliance with the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. Second, we are designated by law as the Principal Policy Liaison to the U.S. Intelligence Community for verification and compliance matters, and thus work closely with the Intelligence Community to see that the United States Government maximizes the quality and timeliness of information relevant to the development, procurement and use of biological agents for offensive purposes. Third, we are responsible for assessing and maximizing the verifiability of agreements or commitments in force or under consideration.

Finally, under the United States National Response Plan, which is a document designed to establish a comprehensive all-hazards approach to enhance the ability of the U.S. to manage emergencies, terrorist events and other incidents, VCI is designated as the U.S. Government lead for foreign coordination of attribution assessments, and will collaborate with law enforcement agencies to determine and verify the origin, sponsorship, source, delivery and responsible party for any BW use event that may constitute a violation of international laws, agreements and treaties.

III. BW Office

I, along with my colleagues at the Department of State, am so concerned about the threat of biological weapons that I very recently created a new office within the Bureau of Verification, Compliance, and Implementation focused exclusively on Biological Weapons Affairs. This office works closely with other offices in the Department of State that address related issues, including the WMD Terrorism and Chemical and Biological Threat Reduction offices in the International Security and Nonproliferation Bureau and the International Health Affairs Office of the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

The new Office of Biological Weapons Affairs enables our experts to come together to recognize, understand, and react to the BW threat. We have experts: in biology, biodefense and biosecurity, epidemiology, intelligence analysis, and the Biological Weapons Convention -- all in an office of less than ten people. This office reaches across the depth and breadth of the U.S. Government to bring in all the expertise available to the table regarding BW attribution, working together with the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Defense, and various organizations within the Intelligence Community. We also work hard to reach out to biological weapons experts in academia and private industry who are actively engaged in activities that we hope will improve our ability to perform accurate and rapid attribution assessments. We do this out of our recognition that the only way to address the problem of BW attribution is to leverage and share information as much as possible and to work with all appropriate agencies and experts to coordinate resources and address gaps. Our effort is small, but purposeful.

IV. Attribution

In the concept paper for this conference and research project, organizers wrote, "the use of biological warfare agents by states or terrorists is one of the world's most frightening security threats." I couldn't agree more. Moreover, I am deeply concerned about the difficulties inherent in accurately identifying and making an attribution assessment of BW use.

The Verification, Compliance, and Implementation Bureau has been working intensely over the past many months on developing an attribution handbook- a combined standard operating procedure and directory on how to begin to gather data necessary to seek further investigation. We are also creating a technology matrix and database of available and developing technologies that can target the BW use problem as well as other issues. We hope to identify and encourage detection methods that will give us the answers in a timely fashion and then ensure that a robust and rigorous investigation is conducted.

We understand, though, that the United States cannot do this alone, and we will work to ensure that the international community can come together around this important topic. Because of this, we want to understand what other nations, NGOs and multilateral organizations can contribute to reporting and investigating allegations of BW use. How can the U.S. and the world collect important data that can be used to identify whether a biological weapon has been used, and if so, what State or organization is responsible? What are the most timely, rigorous and credible means to rapidly collect, evaluate and share data necessary to accurately assess whether biological weapons have been used, to contain the spread of disease if necessary and to make an attribution assessment? My guess is that the circumstances of use allegations and the situation on the ground, where use may take place, are varied enough that there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Rather, we need to consider a multi-layered approach. And we need to arm ourselves with the best tools possible so that we are able to respond to whatever situation we are presented with.

We will need data to request an investigation. Since the alleged use may be in an area of existing conflict, reporting and perhaps even initial screening could come from the NGO community. We should assist their efforts by identifying what data would be most actionable by the international community.

One tool for multilateral investigations is through the existing United Nations mechanism, whereby any member state can bring allegations of BW use to the Secretary General and request that the UN initiate an investigation using personnel drawn from a UN maintained list of experts. Historically, the upside to utilizing a UN investigation has been international buy-in to the results of the investigation. Downsides, however, have included problems with timeliness and political interference.

Another possible tool drawing on the UN would be to turn to the World Health Organization to coordinate an investigation, drawing on its Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, or GOARN. The GOARN investigates, responds to, and works to contain disease outbreaks, as well as other public health events, and operates as

part of the WHO's overall work to strengthen global health security.

Yet another tool would be to work with regional entities, such as NATO, which has a multinational CBRN defense battalion that can provide response teams, laboratory assets and logistical support to lead or support missions investigating allegations of BW use.

We should also ask of ourselves and each other what national means and methods exist that can contribute to all of these multilateral tools. We must all work together to identify the resources and tools that exist for BW use investigations and to encourage development of resources that are still desired. One of the areas we are lacking is in the collection and analysis of baseline data to understand when events have occurred and how to trace them. We need reliable, global information and communication about disease patterns or unusual outbreaks that could signal a bioterrorist attack or bioweapons release, creating a baseline epidemiological picture to enable the world to better protect against the deliberate use of biological pathogens as weapons. We especially need a database of global isolates and strains to enable the tracing of agents used in a BW event to specific regions of the world. And to make all of this happen, both at a national and international level, we need to work together to address these issues realistically.

V. Conclusion

I applaud the efforts of this conference and research project, and appreciate the leadership of the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Contemporary Conflict and King's College London on this very important endeavor. I look forward to hearing your thoughts throughout the conference and hope these proceedings are productive and balanced.

Thank you.

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