



Wilton Park

Programme

Powerful actor, high impact bio-threats

Wednesday 7 – Friday 9 November 2018 | WP1625

The purpose of this meeting is to create new ideas among an international group of senior policy leaders, scientific and technical experts and non-governmental experts to reduce the potential risks posed by high impact biological weapons. Through an open dialogue on the threats posed by powerful actors, this meeting will identify areas of consensus for strengthening national and international efforts to prevent and respond to these threats.

In partnership with Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford; Center for Health Security, the Bloomberg School of Public Health Security, Johns Hopkins and the Nuclear Threat Initiative

Wednesday 7 November

1430

Participants arrive – tea/coffee

1600-1615

Welcome and introduction

Olivier Weatherston

Programme Director, Defence and Security, Wilton Park

1615-1715

1. Powerful actor, high impact bio-threats

What is the working definition of 'powerful actor, high impact bio-threats and bio-weapons, for the purposes of this dialogue? What types of bio-risk have not been discussed in recent years? Why should we worry about less likely risks? What has changed to warrant a discussion now? How worried should we be about fringe risks? What has changed since past international discussions of powerful actor, high impact bio-threats?

Brief initial presentations followed by a moderated group discussion:

Piers Millett

Senior Research Fellow, Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford

Beth Cameron

Vice President, Global Biological Policy and Programs, Nuclear Threat Initiative

Tom Inglesby

Director, Center for Health Security, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

In partnership with:



1715-1800

Group photograph followed by tea/coffee

1800-1900

2. International responses to powerful actor, high impact bio-threats

How are these threats currently being addressed in international efforts? What changes have happened recently that might offer more opportunities for addressing these threats? What opportunities are there to do more to address these threats through existing forums?

Brief initial presentations followed by a moderated group discussion:

Daniel Feakes (via video link)

Chief, BWC Implementation Support Unit, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, United Nations Office at Geneva

Luciana Borio

Director, Medical and Biodefense Preparedness Policy, US National Security Council

Nils Braun

Biology Project Leader, Prime Minister Services, General Secretariat for National Defence and Security, Government of France

1900

Reception followed by dinner

Thursday 8 November

0800-0900

Breakfast

0915-1030

3. Historical efforts to produce large-scale bio-weapons: what does a powerful actor, high impact bio-threat and bio-risk look like?

What historical bio-weapons were developed to have high-consequence impact? Why were they developed and for what purposes? Why were they abandoned (if they were)? Has anything changed that might have affected a country's interest in developing and using them? Or the feasibility of developing them? Have things changed that might impact upon a decision to use these weapons? Has anything changed that might impact the utility of these weapons?

Presentations followed by a question and answer session:

George Korch

Senior Science Advisor, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Department of Health and Human Services

Brian Balmer

Professor of Science Policy Studies, University College London

1030-1100

Tea/coffee

1100-1230

4. Assessing future trajectories for bioscience technical developments and implications for bio-weapon development

Are the historical drivers discussed in the preceding session still relevant today? How can we change drivers that might result in the increased pursuit of offensive biological weapons or enable their development through 'defensive' biological research? By what processes might large-scale biological weapons become normalised in national security strategy? What are the implications of such an outcome? How can that be avoided?

Brief initial presentations followed by a moderated group discussion:

Recent technical advances in biology: the range of changes in biotechnology with the potential to create catastrophic bio-risks

Edward Perello

Principle, Arkurity Ltd.

Safety by Design: Leveraging molecular and biosecurity innovations for novel biotechnology development

Renee Wegrzyn

Program Manager, US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

1230-1345

Lunch

1345

Facilitator briefing for session 6 (Common Room)

1345-1415

Free time

1415-1445

5. Propositions to be discussed in targeted group work sessions

A brief introduction to the working groups for session 6:

This session will cover the topics to be discussed with three presenters laying out a proposition each. A round of group work will then stress-test those propositions.

1. The risk of and taboo against high-consequence bio-weapons

Caitríona McLeish

Senior Fellow, Science Policy Research Unit, Centre for Global Health Policy, The Harvard Sussex Program on Chemical and Biological Weapons, University of Sussex

As biotechnology advances, the taboo against biological weapons will become more important for preventing high-consequence accidents or potential future arms races. Additionally, the taboo could be eroded if a perception emerges that biological weapons are becoming more controllable.

2. The feasibility of high-consequence bio-weapons

David Relman (via video link)

Thomas C. and Joan M. Merigan Professor in Medicine, and Microbiology and Immunology, Stanford University; Chief of Infectious Diseases, Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System

Advances in science and technology are making bioweapons capable of causing a high-consequence impact more feasible (including S&T advances that enhance the potential for humanitarian catastrophe, secondary impacts, potential to compound other events, or potential for environmental de-stabilisation).

3. International capacity and bio-risk

Jeremy Konyndyk

Senior Policy Fellow, Centre for Global Development

High-consequence bioweapons could produce catastrophic epidemics and international capacity to deal with these requires careful consideration and planning.

1445-1615

6. Group work: three future bio-risks

This round of group work will be in rotating 'world café' format. Participants will get a chance to respond to each proposition, with a particular focus on its plausibility and likelihood. The groups will rotate every 30 minutes.

1. The risk of and taboo against high-consequence bio-weapons

Facilitator: Irma Makalinao

Professor and Special Assistant to the Dean, University of the Philippines College of Medicine

Proposition

As biotechnology advances, the taboo against biological weapons will become more important for preventing high-consequence accidents or arms races. Additionally, the taboo could be eroded if a perception emerges that biological weapons are becoming more useful or controllable.

Framing questions for discussion

- Do you agree with the proposition?
- What are the key drivers that could make high-consequence bio-weapons become likely to be pursued in the coming years?

2. The feasibility of high-consequence bioweapons

Facilitator: Larry Kerr

Director, Pandemics and Emerging Threats, US Department of Health and Human Services

Proposition

Advances in science and technology are making bioweapons capable of causing a high-consequence impact more feasible (including S&T advances that enhance the potential for humanitarian catastrophe, secondary impacts, potential to compound other events, or potential for environmental de-stabilisation).

Framing questions

- Do you agree?
- What advances, eg, S&T, previously inaccessible weapons, improved ability to target, or potential for plausible deniability, are most likely to make the risk of development and use of high-consequence biological weapons?

3. International capacity and bio-risk

Facilitator: Cathy Roth

Senior Research Fellow, Infectious Diseases, UK Department for International Development

Proposition

High-consequence bioweapons could produce catastrophic epidemics and international capacity to deal with these requires careful consideration and planning.

Framing questions

- Do you agree?
- What are the gaps and vulnerabilities in the international response architecture?

1615-1645

Tea/coffee

1630

Partner debrief

1645-1800

7. Brainstorming session

Plenary moderated discussion with breakouts:

This session is both a summary of outcomes of the preceding assessment of the nature of the threat/bio-risk, and a preliminary appraisal of what action can/should be taken in response at the policymaker level.

Facilitators and/or presenters will report on the outcomes of the group work so far and draw out some suggestions for what might be done. Participants, in both small-group and plenary format, will start developing outline proposals to 'seed' the group work tomorrow morning.

1800-1900

Free time

1800

Facilitator briefing for session 8 (Library)

1900

Reception followed by dinner

Friday 9 November

0800-0845

Breakfast and checkout

0845-1015

8. Group work: draft suggestions for new responses

This round of group work will not be in rotating format. Participants will be assigned to groups.

1. The risk of and taboo against high-consequence bio-weapons

Participants will develop a new idea and develop specific responses to the following question: what specific approaches can be taken by the global community (government and technical experts) to strengthen the taboo against (high-consequence) bio-weapons?

2. The feasibility of high-consequence bio-weapons

Participants will develop a new idea and develop specific responses to the following question: what specific steps (by governments or policymakers) can be taken to reduce the likelihood of intentional misuse or accidental release?

3. International capacity and bio-risk

Participants will develop a new idea and develop specific responses to the following question: what specific steps (by governments or policymakers) can be taken to fill these gaps, improve awareness, and reduce the risk?

1015-1045

Tea/coffee

1045-1215

9. Concrete steps to address powerful actor, high impact bio-threats

Plenary moderated session:

All attendees discuss the specific pitches by groups and prioritise actions. This session will use electronic voting software to assess collective buy-in to the outcomes of the group work.

Conclusions and wrap-up:

Tom Inglesby

Director, Center for Health Security, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Piers Millett

Senior Research Fellow, Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford

Beth Cameron

Vice President, Global Biological Policy and Programs, Nuclear Threat Initiative

1215-1230

10. Evaluation survey

Completion of online survey

1230

Lunch

1400

Participants depart