



## COUNTERING BIOLOGICAL THREATS

### Challenges for the Department of Defense's Nonproliferation Program Beyond the Former Soviet Union (2009)

The U.S. Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism considers it more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction, probably with biological agents, will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013. The Director General of Interpol underscores that terrorists can buy deadly pathogens or steal them from universities, research laboratories, pharmaceutical companies, military stockpiles, or commercial supply houses. The White House has warned that bioterrorists pose unique and grave threats to the safety and security of the United States and its allies. In this environment, there is a compelling interest in developing new approaches to counter bioterrorism.

In response to a request from the U.S. Congress, this report examines how the unique experience and extensive capabilities of the Biological Threat Reduction Program (BTRP) of the Department of Defense (DOD) can be extended to reduce the threat of bioterrorism within developing countries outside the former Soviet Union (FSU).

BTRP is the largest program in the world designed to counter the global spread of bioterrorism. During the past 12 years, BTRP has invested \$800 million in reducing the risk from bioterrorism with roots in the states of the FSU. The program's accomplishments are many fold.

### PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Few if any developing countries are adequately prepared to address bioterrorism. In the low-income countries and many areas of middle-income countries, the primary security threats are those associated with survival—ensuring enough food and water, adequate shelter, and tolerable levels of diseases. In these circumstances, neither the governments nor the people can give priority to addressing a seemingly abstract threat of bioterrorism.

With international assistance, most developing countries have for decades been upgrading their public health and agricultural disease surveillance and response systems. But progress is slow and uneven. Capabilities to prevent and respond to the spread of disease agents by bioterrorists depend on these same systems, while also requiring additional security arrangements.

Governments of many developing countries would welcome BTRP's assistance in enhancing biosecurity. Others may be less comfortable in providing new entry points for an expanded U.S. military presence, however well meaning.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account possible sensitivities about a U.S. military presence, BTRP should promptly begin to engage interested governments in about 10 developing countries outside the FSU in biological threat reduction activities during the next 5 years. Whenever possible, BTRP should partner with programs of other organizations that have well-established humanitarian reputations in the countries of interest. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization, should be considered as potential partners.

The risk of bioterrorism is too great for BTRP not to be among the leading organizations in addressing the threat outside the FSU. BTRP should emphasize a systems approach to contain a range of pathogens—particularly those of day-to-day health concern—to strengthen health and agricultural surveillance capabilities, to improve pathogen security—and to support research activities on a broad basis. Strategic plans and meaningful metrics to measure progress should be developed with partner governments to guide the effort. The sustainability of activities after BTRP departs deserves the highest priority. In addition, DOD's planning and operational procedures should be streamlined so as not to place excessive bureaucratic burdens on partner governments or delay the program.

DOD should promptly identify initial target countries. Selection criteria should include (1) likelihood of significant risk reduction through BTRP activities and (2) likelihood that BTRP-supported successes can be sustained over the long term. In some cases, BTRP may be the lead external program in the country for biosecurity enhancement over a number of years. In other cases, BTRP may play a supporting role for broader international efforts.

Discrete, time-limited, and action-oriented projects rather than vague promises and discussion should continue to characterize BTRP's approaches. In time, BTRP activities, as part of an integrated U.S. government effort, should increase respect for U.S. humanitarian-oriented objectives while reducing biosecurity threats.

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