

## **ISSUES CONCERNING THE PROBLEM OF BIOTERRORISM**

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*The nature of the bioterrorist threat requires the development of countermeasures for states all over the globe because bioterrorism is a common issue for all states and involves embracing joint solutions. In the article the author describes the threat that bioterrorism represents and elaborates concrete proposals regarding the improvement of the authorities' reaction to a bioterrorist attack.*

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The vulnerabilities to NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) threats and dangers have been and still remain high. Nobody can afford to disregard or to understate them. The unprecedented development of nuclear and chemical industry, the emergence and development of binary weapons, of genetic weapons and other means which can always be easily converted into lethal or non lethal weapons (but still weapons) and their ability to be used by criminal networks, by organizations and by terrorist groups further enhance this type of threat. They are not used by a limited number of persons or in a specific area, but globally. Since the discovery and use of chemical warfare and nuclear weapons, these means have become a general threat, globalizing the war. Therefore, the NBC defense remains a priority at least for the near future<sup>1</sup>.

The risk of the use of bioterrorism is increasing given the augmented ethnic and religious violence and human rights violations<sup>2</sup>. International treaties related to these types of weapons do not provide sufficient control

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<sup>1</sup> [http://essas.unap.ro/ro/pdf\\_publicatii/cs03-04.pdf](http://essas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_publicatii/cs03-04.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Moreover, terrorist groups may use biological agents not only to kill the enemy, but also to reduce the capacity of opposition. Such agents can be used as blackmail tools for achieving political or financial results.

measures. Therefore, the fight against terrorism requires the involvement of both states and non-governmental organizations.

Biological risks give a new dimension to possible terrorist attacks, accidents, natural disasters and / or pandemics because of their transnational aspect and the large number of casualties. An appropriate response to such a danger not only includes ex post intervention programs, but must be elaborated in much earlier stages, when handling these materials, by appropriate storage, limited access and control, etc. Meanwhile, the interventions after an incident require extensive cooperation between different authorities in a state which is member of the E.U. (civil, military, police etc. protection), and between national authorities and E.U. corps. Therefore, a coordinated approach is needed for all types of disasters.

The bioterrorist hazard phenomenon, the development of more and more destructive forms and techniques for society as a means of influencing national and international communities and the weakening of global stability led to joint action to tackle it and achieve a common front, a coalition of global amplitude.

The risks of bioterrorism are on a worldwide scale. There are no borders in spreading smallpox, anthrax or plague. The threat is global and therefore the response must be global. United Nations (UN) considers that cooperation between international, regional and sub-regional organizations is essential. The international community must prevent the possession or use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by non-state groups or entities<sup>3</sup>.

Some authors<sup>4</sup> have described the use of biological weapons by terrorists as reasons for the following aspects: the desire to cause the death of a large number of people, the desire to disable the enemy, political or criminal reasons, and the decrease of trust and stability of a state<sup>5</sup>.

Also, Jonathan B. Tucker has identified some of the motivational factors for people who use biological weapons as follows: lack of external constituents, apocalyptic ideology, paranoia and grandeur, the defense by assault, capturing the attention of international media, causing economic damage, the superiority complex, imitating God, the aura of science, etc<sup>6</sup>.

To effectively prevent and combat the risk of bioterrorist attacks, it is necessary to improve cooperation and exchange of best practices between

<sup>3</sup> Ciobanu, Oana-Magdalena, *Bioterrorism – the invisible enemy*, „Intelligence” Magazine nr. 14/2008, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Carus, W. Seth, *Bioterrorism and Biocrimes: The Illicit Use of Biological Agents since 1900*, Fredonia Books, Amsterdam, 2002, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Clauzon, Lorene, *Guerre biologique et bioterrorisme ou comment la nature devient une arme (these presentee et soutenue publiquement)*, Universite „Henri Poincare”, Nancy, 2009, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> <http://cns.miis.edu/research/cbw/toxch.htm>

states which are members of the E.U. and the states that have developed expertise in biological risk assessment, prevention, detection, communication and response, such as USA, Australia and India. It also requires common policies to encourage the restoration of land affected by biological contamination as soon as possible, to restore normal use of soil and land, thereby reducing risks for peoples' health and the environment.

The society remains very vulnerable to bioterrorist attacks, which, in the coming years, could expand and diversify their effects in reaching catastrophic levels.

Perhaps in the coming years the main effort of international terrorism will focus on the use of specialists to adapt the biological agents and the means of delivery to the type of action covered by terrorist strategies. In this regard, large urban areas, means of transport and, possibly, military units, schools, institutions and even some international institutions and all U.S. allied countries will be targeted.

Analysis of current situation allows the assertion that the possibility of terrorists using biological agents is a real threat. It is difficult, even impossible, to predict when a bioterrorist attack will be committed, so the threat can be summarized in one sentence: "The key is not to know if it will happen, but when." For this reason, intelligence and internal security play a major role in identifying potential threats through their attribute of collecting information.

*Nationwide, one of the major problems lies in education and training of personnel involved in preventing and combating bioterrorism, firstly medical personnel, police personnel, intelligence services and civil protection. Information on CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear) weapons are considered sensitive or classified and detection and response (combat) procedures are kept in the confidential area.*

Protection and defense against bioterrorism requires prompt intervention from specialized institutions and structures that must be an interface between the scientific world and human society which has to be prepared and defended through special means from this type of terrorism which remains, judging by the degree of danger, the number one threat that all states deal with.

*Therefore, we believe it is necessary to establish a national system to respond to emergency situations.* It should eliminate the effects of biological attacks (CBRN attacks in general), including those carried out by terrorists. Measures within this system could include, inter alia, the following aspects: location and isolation of the biologically attacked areas, prevention of spreading the contamination to other areas, prompt intervention of specialized structures to treat population and decontaminate the area and other strictly specialized measures.

Response to bioterrorism must be well coordinated and integrated, as it mobilizes diverse human and material resources and involves multiple institutions and authorities - Ministry of Health, informational services, public order and safety services, customs, civil protection services, etc.

At present, not even the major gateways into the country (like airports) are ready to intervene if the patient is suspected of Ebola, hemorrhagic fever or shows symptoms of diseases that are transmitted by air and that could affect entire cities. To limit the risk of epidemics special protective suits, mobile laboratories with decontamination capacity, quarantine facilities, trained staff etc. are necessary.

In our opinion, the national response and reaction to a bioterrorist attack must be based on an integrated model consisting of the following components:

a) Public order policemen. The first police officers notified are members of law enforcement and public safety responsible for general missions, that will have to be able to take measures to ensure their personal protection, to report on the situation to the various responsible authorities, to observe any symptoms, to provide a safety perimeter around the place of the attack and to conduct all other activities that the specialized teams will require.

To achieve these activities, police training is required for the policemen who ensure the public order, for those who do field work, who are in the "front line" against crime. Training should aim at acquiring knowledge on the recognition of potential bioterrorist indicators, handling suspicious, unknown letters or packages, etc.

b) *Specialized police structures*. These teams are made up of officers who will take the most important provisions in case of attack. They must be equipped with personal protective, biological equipment, must have completed a training program and must have operational support. Policemen in these structures must be able to disarm improvised dissemination devices, to limit the effects of attack and to proceed to an examination of the place of the offense, especially to collect evidence samples from contaminated areas<sup>7</sup>.

The success of the intervention measures implemented depends on the achievement of a professional training<sup>8</sup> regarding the identification of potential risks and attacks, on the use of personal protective equipment, on devices and methods which would reduce the consequences of an attack, on the concept of inter-operation and support systems.

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<sup>7</sup> Police operations at the contaminated site must rely on an effective decontamination system which applies to team members, equipment both when entering and leaving the area.

<sup>8</sup> Policemen who intervene after a potential bioterrorist act must do so within the limits of professional expertise, personal safety being a priority.

The police structures must also consider the possibility to accommodate officers from specialized structures (the assault response teams) throughout the investigation. Policemen charged with solving the case may also be exposed to biological agents and therefore be infected. In this respect, it is recommended that the policemen should not come in contact with their families during this period, so ensuring new housing would be necessary to prevent contamination.

c) *Biology specialists.* These persons must be able to provide real time support and advice on the features and the production of biological agents, on area security, on medical and decontamination intervention teams.

d) *Medical teams.* They must be at the place of biological contamination in order to take care of the police intervention team. Any person entering or leaving the area should be subjected to a medical surveillance. It is especially important that the staff be able to administer to the intervention team preventive treatment against accidental exposure to a biological agent. Depending on the suspected biological agent used in the attack, medical personnel must administer antibiotics or vaccines and also provide medical supervision for a specified period.

e) *The investigative bodies* - are composed of prosecutors, police officers working with health services and other pre-established services which will cooperate during the investigation by sharing information and ensuring operational support.

f) *The personnel specialized in public communication and media relations:* this category includes press officers and spokespersons operating within the police and public health services and other bodies. The use or threat of use of biological agents by terrorists is likely to produce important psychological effects among the civilian population, which can create difficulties for law enforcement services. Intervention plans should include a communication strategy in relation with the media<sup>9</sup>. Structures charged with law enforcement and health, medical and political authorities need to communicate statements quickly to media to ensure dissemination of accurate information and calm the state of confusion and fear among the population. The joint team responsible for relations with the media must participate in training and operations.

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<sup>9</sup> Examples of media strategies: making statements on radio and TV within joint press conferences by; clearly indicating what is known and what is not known; developing an action plan to convince people that an investigation is actively carried out; ensuring that any request for a public action is clear and concise; encouraging the media to disseminate information in coordination with the joint team responsible for media relations; admitting that the media is the main source of public information; media approaching the event in a serious manner can encourage people to approach law enforcement services with useful information on some suspicious activity.

To assess the functioning of the proposed system, we believe it is necessary to organize a national simulation exercise of bioterrorist attacks. These will test the ability to defend the state against a biological attack, the preparation of people in case of crisis, crisis management, etc.

In the context of biological attacks with anthrax carried out in the U.S. in 2001, the response of the authorities had a special connotation. Therefore, we believe it is necessary to adopt a public, unclassified procedure in the Ministry of Interior referring to the method of intervention in case of discovery of envelopes or packages suspected of containing biological agents. They may represent a hazard to people, especially when found in public places (stations, airports, shops, public transport etc.).

From the moment of receiving the notification or alert regarding the existence of an envelope or package suspected to contain biological agents, it is necessary to establish a dialogue with the complainant. The dialogue aims at a first assessment of the notification and informing the plaintiff what conduct to be adopted, determining whether intervention on-site of the CBRN team of specialists is necessary. Early intervention services must be provided by police and medical services. Personnel providing intervention must implement the regulations proper for biological risks before conducting any operation of handling suspicious substances.

After lifting and carrying suspicious substances to specialized laboratories, these will be subjected to a special examination to determine the presence or absence of biological agents. All activities included in the authorities' intervention must be based on protecting the intervention teams, the people exposed to biological agents and limiting the expansion effects of biological agents.

Among the new problems that require the involvement of intelligence services there is the defense of the border and other points of entry for persons and goods against biological weapons and related threats. In the past, there were intelligence and operational failures resulting in failure of foreseeing terrorist attacks and services had neither the knowledge nor the capacity needed to prevent them.

Civil society must be mobilized and informed of the bioterrorist threat by initiating and carrying out media campaigns in this regard. Transparency is now an indispensable condition for the preservation of public confidence in state institutions.

Therefore, we believe it is necessary to initiate and develop an effective information campaign to prepare public awareness about the threat of bioterrorism and what measures might be needed after such an event, as part of crisis management response and management of consequences, in order to maintain any affected areas of critical national infrastructure.

*All in all, we believe that no country is prepared enough to deal with bioterrorism. The vulnerability of any state to bioterrorism is undeniable, regardless of resources (financial, human, etc.) allocated in this area by the states. Preventing terrorism, which is a major target for all states, is a difficult task because terrorist groups have crossed the threshold from traditional attacks to using unconventional means - weapons of mass destruction.*

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