General Assembly 1: Disarmament and International Security

Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction

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Introduction

Ever since the 9/11 incident occurred, countries have come to realise the threat worldwide terrorism poses and have been intensifying security measures nationally and internationally to reduce terrorist attacks around the globe. As the efforts to combat terrorism are gaining momentum, many terrorist groups are also developing through the usage of advanced warfare technology. This poses a serious problem to nations because it renders all efforts to improve security and minimise civilian casualties moot.

Although terrorism can be seen in many forms, the most lethal attacks take place when terrorist organisations acquire WMD. With the capabilities of WMD, terrorists can carry out large-scale attacks of mass murder. Weapons of mass destruction are not easy to obtain, but when they fall into the wrong hands, the effects can be devastating. The consequences of terrorism are not limited by the confines of a country and concern the whole world. That is why measures need to be put in place to prevent these effects further and keep WMD out of terrorist grasp.

Definition of Key Terms

**Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD):** A nuclear, radiological, chemical or biological weapon that can bring death and significant harm to a large number of humans and cause considerable damage to human-made structures and the environment.

For purposes of U.S. criminal law concerning terrorism, weapons of mass destruction are defined in detail as:

- Any weapon that is designed or intended to cause death or serious bodily injury through the release or impact of toxic or poisonous chemicals.
- Any weapon involving a biological agent, toxin, or vector.

- Any weapon that is designed to release radiation or radioactivity at a level dangerous to human life
- any destructive device defined as an explosive, incendiary, or poison gas having a propellant charge of more than four ounces, or an incendiary charge of more than one-quarter ounce.
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**Nuclear Weapon**: A nuclear weapon is a bomb or a missile that uses nuclear energy to cause an explosion. Radiological effects do occur as a result of detonation, but a nuclear weapon uses blast, heat, and overpressure to destroy its target.

**Radiological Weapon**: A radiological weapon is designed to spread radioactive material. It is also called a “dirty bomb” or an”RDD” (radiological dispersion device).

**Chemical Weapon**: A chemical weapon is a specialised munition that uses chemicals formulated to inflict death or harm on humans.

**Biological Weapon**: Biological weapons are intended to kill or incapacitate humans, animals or plants with the use of biological toxins or infectious agents.

Terrorism: The use of violence to purport a political, religious, or ideological change. Terrorism is carried out by non-state actors and often directs targets from a larger spectrum of society. This means that places, where a large number of people are gathered, are targeted. This not only creates a psychological impact on the populace but makes the random attacks almost impossible to predict and the results hard to prevent.

Non-conventional weapon: A synonym for WMD. It is the opposite of the term conventional weapon which refers to weapons that are in relatively wide use.

**Focused Overview of the Issue**

**Terrorist Usage of WMDs**

Throughout the years terrorists have used many tactics to spread fear usually on the path of extremist ideologies and have utilised a variety of weapons to accomplish their goals. The grip of modern terrorism has only begun to strengthen in the last ten years, but the roots of terrorism can be traced back to the French revolution. Therefore, terrorist weapons of choice have also changed and will continue to change as technology advances.

A simple yet critical event in 1995 changed the concept of terrorist warfare entirely. A Japanese, religious terrorist group used a large amount of nerve gas to attack subway lines in Tokyo affecting more than 5000 people. This was the first official use of a chemical warfare agent in terrorism and although the next case of a terrorist employing the utilisation of a WMD was not for some time this attack undoubtedly opened up the serious possibility of the usage WMD in acts of terrorism.

Terrorist usage of WMD is not a new issue but is uncommon among most terrorist organisations. The majority of terrorists engage in acts that aim to capture the attention of the public and media, and they often refrain from using non-conventional weapons which could result in the alienation of their supporters and more importantly trigger severe governmental countermeasures. These terrorists are also known for choosing to attack symbolic targets or particular persons to attract attention to their cause instead of targeting much larger masses.
The problem is that as terrorist organisations witness the effectiveness and destructive capabilities of WMD, certain groups who can utilise this destructive potential can become very hard for nations to handle. There have been some clear statements by terrorist organisations expressing their goals to acquire WMD and although most organisations operate in a more discreet manner, evidence of attempts to obtain or even manufacture WMD, such as the discovery of a partially built biological weapons factory near terrorist territory, has been brought to light. This shows that despite WMD being a less common choice in attacks the threat of terrorists using WMD is a very pressing issue that must be recognised and taken seriously by member states.

**Effects of WMD**

WMD have a tremendous destructive capability, and their usage usually leads to irreversible damage. Nuclear weapons, for example, can even be detonated from outside the target country's borders and still have enough power to decimate entire populations. The remnants of the radiation released by the detonation of a nuclear weapon or dirty bomb can contaminate the environment for many years and cause health problems among residents of that area, problems that will be passed on for generations.

Effects of chemical WMD are listed as internal and external haemorrhaging, nausea, cramps, convulsions, coma, etc. Chemical WMD not only trigger violent symptoms but can also cause permanent damage or even death to victims. Chemical weapons can be lethal or non-lethal but either way, they can weaken large groups of people whether this is civilians or the local militia.

Biological weapons cause the symptoms of the biological agents they carry but are especially dangerous because of their capability of person to person transmission. Bio weapons can spread quickly and infect the population with diseases such as smallpox or pneumatic plague. This feature can be undesirable to many nations because the agent can also spread to unintended populations but since containment is of no concern to terrorist organisations the effects of this type of WMD remain a significant problem.

**Major Parties Involved**

**United States**: The US is a country that has already taken severe measures against terrorists with the establishment of the anti-terrorism organisation by the Department of Homeland Security in response to the September 11 attacks. The US places a high priority on cooperating with a broad range of international partners to initiate policies that will aim to meet the challenge of global WMD terrorism. The Office of Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism is a governmental organisation of the US. Its goal is stated as: "Counter the threat of terrorists acquiring and/or using weapons of mass destruction by working with foreign partners to establish, strengthen, and maintain their capabilities to deter, detect, defeat, and respond to terrorist attempts to acquire or use chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear materials."
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The US announced the first “National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction” in 2003 and has taken a leadership role regarding this issue with a series of multinational initiatives.

**International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):** The IAEA has been working with many partner nations to reduce the threat of WMD.

20 March 1995  The first acknowledged terrorist attack employing a chemical warfare agent occurs

9 September 2001  A series of four terrorist attacks on the United States occurs. Although WMDs are not used this attack holds significant importance regarding security measures taken against terrorism.

September 2001  Biological weapons containing anthrax are used in multiple locations just one week after the 9/11 attacks.

14 September 2005  The Nuclear Terrorism Convention signed.

2002  The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction is announced at the G8 summit.

May 2003  The United States launches the PSI initiative to combat the trafficking of WMDs

2017  As of 2017 the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism has 116 signatories and 106 state parties and the efforts to combat WMD terrorism have improved significantly.

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

Since the question regarding the terrorist usage of WMD depends mostly on security, governments have already put in place certain measures to ensure that WMD do not fall into the wrong hands.

The Nuclear Terrorism Convention is a United Nations treaty designed to: “Criminalise acts of nuclear terrorism and to promote police and judicial cooperation to prevent, investigate, and punish those acts”. It was drafted in April 2005 and signed later in the year and gained the support of nuclear powers such as China, France, India, Russia, the UK and the US.
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The Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction is a security initiative that was introduced at the 2002 G8 summit. The initiative pledges to commit US$ 20 billion, over a ten-year period, towards the elimination and protection of some weapons of mass destruction. Initiated in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the partnership aims to deny terrorist access to WMD, destroy stockpiles of chemical weapons, dismantle decommissioned nuclear submarines, safeguard/dispose of the fissile material as well as employ former weapons scientists.

The Proliferation Security Initiative is a partnership with the aim of stopping trafficking of weapons of mass destruction and all systems relevant to their utilisation to parties of proliferation concern. It was put forward by United States President George Bush.

The other primary goal of solving this issue, which was accomplished partially, was nuclear disarmament. Countries are still working toward this goal since it is the key to better controlling and eventually eradicating the use of WMD and preventing their misuse. Other than that, most countries have naturally formed national sub-bodies of anti-terrorism as a response to the looming threat. Despite the lack of WMD usage on behalf of terrorists many measures against this potential threat have been implemented into the policies of member states willing to reach a consensus. While some of these steps have failed to be accepted, most have been successful and have mainly succeeded in paving the path to a secure future.

Possible Solutions

Once terrorist organisations acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction, the results can be quite devastating therefore the goal is to strengthen old measures and put in place new ones to cut off their access to WMD. Nations already taking action against terrorism inside their borders show that there is initiative to combat this threat but new and improved international agreements such as the ones listed above must be reached in order address this issue as a whole.

Terrorism is a worldwide issue and cooperation between nations is needed above all else to solve it.

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