



BONN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR CONVERSION

B · I · C · C

bulletin

No. 35

April 2005

A Call for Tighter Policing Tools for Biological Weapons

by Amy E. Smithson

In recent years, many international leaders have described biological weapons—particularly in the hands of terrorists—as the most insidious threat to international peace and security. Yet, the 30th anniversary of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), which bans the development, production, and stockpiling of germ weapons, slipped by on 26 March 2005 practically unnoticed. The BWC's 30th anniversary could have been an occasion to launch concerted international action to reinforce the biological weapons nonproliferation regime that sorely needs fortification. Instead, roughly 80 years after the 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibiting the use of biological and chemical weapons first began to give essence to a norm against biological weapons, the international community finds itself almost back at square one.

The Geneva Protocol and the BWC have both been violated, with Japan having used germ weapons in China during World War II, and the former Soviet Union having mounted a monumental covert bioweapons program. Though sufficient detail has long been known about these and other violations, the international community has not pressed for accountability or even for an admission of wrong-doing by the states responsible, much less meted out any punishment. Moreover, at the behest of the United States, in 2002 the international community abandoned efforts to inaugurate monitoring provisions for the BWC. Unless the international community acts, aspiring proliferators will be emboldened to exploit a dangerously weak biological weapons nonproliferation regime.

The establishment of an effective bioweapons nonproliferation regime is a formidable task. Not only are the very diseases at the heart of these weapons available in nature, the materials, equipment, and

know-how that are used to make them are also fundamental to legitimate research laboratories and industries. Avenues to biological weapons cannot be totally closed without sacrificing the beneficial science and commercial products that depend on these dual-use items. However, a trio of policing tools that are now being unevenly practiced could greatly enhance the ability to hamper proliferation.

The first of these tools is biosafety, which encompasses procedural training and other precautions taken to avert accidental infections among laboratory workers, as well as the physical containment barriers that prevent the release of pathogens outside of a facility. Biosafety should be upgraded worldwide. Even at the premier US and Russian biodefense facilities, since 2000, scientists have made mistakes that resulted in exposure or possible exposure to glanders, anthrax, and Ebola. Scientists concerned about the ethical implications of modern life sciences research began creating a second tool in 1975 to ensure that the mixture of advanced

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technologies, scientists' innate drive to explore the frontiers of science, and the inherent unpredictability of scientific experimentation do not result in the diversion of research for malevolent purposes. Oversight of genetic engineering research could play a fundamental role in preventing the deliberate or inadvertent creation of new and more deadly bioweapons. The third tool is biosecurity, which refers to the measures taken to control access to and transfer of a specified list of particularly dangerous pathogens, such as the Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever virus, the toxin ricin, and *Yersinia pestis*, the bacterium that causes plague.

Instead of accepting a norm against biological weapons that is more fiction than fact, the international community should chart a course that will at last make the norm authentic. Sound models are available to jumpstart the establishment of universal standards for biosafety, biosecurity, and oversight of genetic engineering, and a draft treaty to criminalize bioweapons-related activities waits in the wings. The alternative is to leave un-policed scientists conducting cutting edge, dual-use research and proliferators with openings to steal, divert, and fraudulently acquire

weapons materials. Integrated globally and implemented thoroughly at the national and institutional levels with mandatory noncompliance penalties, these standards can help restrain biological weapons proliferation and foster the responsible conduct of science.

These watchdog measures would complement an eventual BWC monitoring regime, providing inspectors with more ways to distinguish legitimate facilities from those masking covert weapons activities. Though it goes against prevailing political winds, the BWC members should elect at the 2006 BWC Review Conference to resume negotiations on a monitoring protocol, tossing out much of the weak text that failed to garner support in 2001. The fuel for this negotiation should be new monitoring proposals based on the synergy between inspections and the new biosafety, biosecurity, and research oversight regimes; a thorough analysis of the effective inspection experience in Iraq; the latest technologies in forensic microbiology; and the results of additional trial inspections at dual-use government, academic, and industry facilities. Renewed negotiations would undoubtedly benefit from a strong partnership with the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries, which often employ the highest caliber technical experts. What remains to be seen is whether the international community has the political will to combat biological weapons proliferation with actions, not just words.

The international community can ill-afford to perpetuate its careless custody of the norm against biological weapons. Passivity makes all nations equal prey to proliferators who could instigate biological disaster. Realizing this norm will be a complicated, daunting endeavor, but the costs of failing to meet that challenge head-on could be astronomical.

Amy E. Smithson, Ph.D, is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC.

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BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion) is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting peace and development through the efficient and effective transformation of military-related structures, assets, functions and processes.

This newsletter is published quarterly by

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An der Elisabethkirche 25, 53113 Bonn, Germany.

Responsible for this issue: Susanne Heinke, Heike Webb (editing) and Svenja Bends (layout and publishing management).

**Phone: +49-228-911960
Fax: +49-228-241215
E-mail: bicc@bicc.de
Internet: www.bicc.de**

Staff Spotlight:



Julie Brethfeld

Julie Brethfeld first came across BICC in 2001 when she was working for InWEnt. Around that time she realized that she couldn't live off the archaeological and anthropological studies she did at Bonn University, so she decided to focus on political sciences. In 2003 she joined BICC as a student assistant and continued to work there as a junior researcher in January 2004 after having received her Master's degree.

As Julie grew up in a family involved in the peace movement (she still gets nervous whenever she sees white doves) unsurprisingly, weapons had always been a taboo in her life. Or so she thought.

However, only two decades and one Cold War later she found herself behind a desk doing research on small arms and light weapons. Now she works as project manager for BICC's small arms control project TRESA (Training and Education on Small Arms). Together with her TRESA colleagues she provides training, develops training material, and does research on topics such as small arms policies, gender, and children associated with armed groups. At the moment she is planning a series of video workshops on children and small arms, in which children will be given the opportunity to express their views on and experiences with armed violence by producing films.

As a long-term consequence of her studies in cultural anthropology, Julie has a special interest in the link between weapons and culture. One day she hopes to find out more about the point at which arms, once functional tools, turn to symbolic objects, thus becoming part of a society's culture. So far she doesn't know yet how to integrate archaeology into her work at BICC, but welcomes suggestions.

Whenever she has time Julie travels to exotic places, such as South East Asia or South East Germany. She highly appreciates that she can call wonderful people her friends, and has to smile when she sees trees blossoming in spring.

For further information please contact
→ Julie Brethfeld at jb@bicc.de

Website and Discussion Forum on Private Military and Security Companies

Private military service provider and security firms appear as ever more relevant actors in a number of contemporary conflict zones. They are employed by governments, international organizations, multinational corporations and NGOs to deliver a variety of different tasks, ranging from logistical support in peacekeeping operations, provision of personnel security, risk management and security sector reform. Although there is only little available data, private security companies seem to complement almost any international response to complex humanitarian emergencies in zones of war and conflict. Indeed, it is estimated that the worldwide revenues of the private security industry, which equalled about US \$55.6 billion in 1990, have steadily increased with an annual growth rate of 8 percent and are expected to reach US \$202 billion by 2010. In May 2004 the Pentagon released a list of 60 contracted security companies operating in Iraq with an aggregate total of 20,000 employees. This number is most likely to increase in proportion to a declining presence of US troops.

The debate over the both positive and negative implications posed by this development is far from concluded. Concern exists in particular with regard to questions of democratic and parliamentary oversight, transparency, accountability and the status of these companies in both national and international law. Also, it is increasingly recognized that the industry's boom might be indicative of larger changes in the structural constellations influencing the global organization of violence.

The academic community has only gradually begun to subject the issue to a closer investigation. Indeed, while overall interest can be expected to increase over the next couple of years, as yet there is no concerted network of academic exchange. As a reaction to this shortcoming, the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) established an internet-based resource site and discussion forum on the issue of private military and security companies. Since April 2005 the site can be accessed at www.bicc.de/pmc/portal.php. The overall aim is to raise awareness concerning the possible dangers accompanying the perceived changes in the international security system. For this purpose, the website will pool important information, situate the phenomenon within a broader perspective and, last but not least, encourage a constructive and inter-disciplinary debate between researchers and practitioners interested in fields related to the privatization of warfare, security and

peacebuilding. Moreover, the forum will post relevant announcements of conferences, calls for papers and new publications. Very soon, a fairly extensive listing of publicly accessible online-publications will also be added, as will be a loose series of Working Papers identifying some avenues for future research. All interested academics, researchers, practitioners and students are invited to join.

For further information please contact
→ Marc von Boemcken at boemcken@bicc.de
or www.bicc.de/pmc/portal.php

Demobilization and Reintegration in the Western Balkans

Since 2003, BICC and its partner DCAF, the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, have collaborated on the issue of demobilization and reintegration of redundant military personnel in the Western Balkans. The first outcome of this joint project was BICC *brief 27 "Turning Soldiers into a Workforce: Demobilization and Reintegration in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina"*. A second study on the restructuring of the armed forces and the demobilization and reintegration of redundant military personnel in Serbia and Montenegro (SaM) has just been finished and will be published soon as BICC *brief 31*. The study will feature not only a thorough assessment of the set-up and prospects of the Serbia-Montenegro retraining project but, thanks to the support of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, a first detailed overview on the development and current state of the Armed Forces in terms of size and composition.

Currently, BICC is conducting research for the third study in this series issued by DCAF which will complete the picture on demobilization and reintegration in the region with retraining measures for redundant personnel in Croatia, Macedonia and Albania being the research objects. As the issue of base conversion has recently gained importance and has again attracted public interest, the comparative study will also include an analysis of the ongoing efforts in and obstacles for base closure and redevelopment in the aforementioned three countries. Together with DCAF, the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe and NATO's Economic Directorate, BICC has identified the growing demand related to base conversion and has been involved in recent joint initiatives such as the possible establishment of a regional defense conversion center in Croatia.

For further information please contact
→ Tobias Pietz at pietz@bicc.de

BICC Publications

In addition to its annual *conversion survey*, the BICC/DCAF *security sector governance and conversion studies* and other books, BICC publishes *briefs, papers* and the quarterly newsletter *bulletin*. These series analyze international aspects of arms, peacebuilding and conflict, report on projects and experience gained, and offer scientific as well as practical know-how. Further details can be obtained at www.bicc.de/publications/

paper 41:

Leonid Polyakov, *Aging Stocks of Ammunition and SALW in Ukraine: Risks and Challenges*, February 2005

paper 42:

Vera Chrobok, *Demobilizing and Reintegrating Afghanistan's Young Soldiers. A Review and Assessment of Program Planning and Implementation*, April 2005

forthcoming

brief 31:

Tobias Pietz, *Demobilizing and Retraining for the Future. The Armed Forces in Serbia and Montenegro*, June 2005

BICC 2005. *Conversion Survey 2005: Global Disarmament, Demilitarization and Demobilization*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, May 2005

BICC/DCAF security sector governance and conversion studies:

no. 11: Herbert Wulf. 2005. *Internationalisierung und Privatisierung von Krieg und Frieden*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, June 2005

BICC Notes

BICC and UNU (United Nations University) signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** at a reception on the occasion of the 29th Conference of UNU Directors in Bonn, 5 April 2005. The memorandum outlines a deepening of the long-lasting cooperation between BICC and UNU as well as the organisation of joint projects such as work in the area of natural resources and the environment as well as of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

For further information please contact
→ Peter J. Croll at croll@bicc.de

On 28 April, BICC and DGVN (German Society for the United Nations) organized a **panel discussion on the question "60 years after World War II: Are the veto powers still governing the United Nations?"** at the Haus der Geschichte, Bonn. Panelists were Prof. em. Dr. Ernst-Otto Czempel, guest researcher at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK), Dr. Otto Lampe, Leader of the Task Force for Global Issues, German Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Christoph Zöpel, member of the German Federal Parliament and chair of the board of directors of the DGVN. Dr. Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, BICC, was moderator to the discussion. The event was supported

by the city of Bonn and CIC Bonn (Center for International Cooperation).

For further information please contact
→ Susanne Heinke at heinke@bicc.de

On 31 May, BICC will present the 10th edition of its **conversion survey**. The *survey* collects, analyzes and comments events, trends, activities and research in its main areas of work. The 2005 edition of the *conversion survey* reflects the new structure of work at BICC adopted in 2004 and contains information under the three major headings of arms and resources, conversion-related aspects of peacebuilding and links between conflict and resources. Three additional topical chapters explore select aspects of conversion in more detail.

For further information please contact
→ Michael Brzoska at mb@bicc.de

BICC's Small Arms Training and Education Project **TRESA** can now be visited **online at www.tresa-online.org**. This preliminary website provides information on the project itself, its objectives, and its training approach, and gives an overview of target groups and training topics. It also offers training material and tools that are available free of charge. These include the first TRESA module "Basic Principles of Field Research on Small Arms Action", a guide for small arms collection and destruction, and BICC's photo exhibition "Small Arms—A global threat".

For further information, please contact
→ Julie Brethfeld at jb@bicc.de

On 14 June 2005 the **Friedensgutachten 2005** will be presented at the Federal Press Office in Berlin. Beside the editors' meeting with the President of the German Parliament, they will hold further discussions of the report with relevant parliamentary bodies. The annual *Friedensgutachten* is a joined publication of the five major German peace research institutions (www.bicc.de/friedensgutachten/fga.html)

For further information please contact
→ Corinna Hauswedell at ch@bicc.de

"Millennium Development Goals 2015—Acting Globally for Poverty Reduction, Peace and Development" is the title of a new photo exhibition of BICC, which will be presented from 2 until 30 June in the Stadthaus Bonn (Berliner Platz 2, 53111 Bonn). The exhibition, which will be produced in cooperation with the photo agency *laif* (Cologne), is supported by the promotion program for development-policy education of InWent gGmbH (Capacity Building International, Germany), the city of Bonn and the representative of the Millennium Campaign in Germany, Dr. Renée Ernst.

For further information please contact
→ Susanne Heinke at heinke@bicc.de