

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The regime governing biological and toxin weapons is under increasing strain. While many of its shortcomings are not new, developments in the international threat environment along with ongoing advances in science and technology are combining to underline such shortcomings and the dangers they represent in a manner not previously experienced.

Unfortunately, circumstances have also combined to insure that the capacity to substantially improve the regime has declined at the very time when significant reforms are needed most. In particular, differences over the pursuit of a compliance protocol for the BTWC have worked to generate division among regime members and uncertainty as to how best to insure the future health of the regime.

Fashioning an effective and politically viable strategy for strengthening the regime under such conditions is clearly difficult -- particularly in view of the time and effort already invested in attempts to secure a protocol.

Yet efforts to strengthen the regime are sorely needed. In their absence, the regime's future would be placed in still greater jeopardy. Absent effective international measures to address the threat of BW, the threat itself will likely increase -- as accessibility to the knowledge and technology required to develop BW spreads throughout the international system

Ideas and strategies aimed at strengthening the regime are plentiful. Yet the prospects for adopting measures offering quick and far-reaching improvements to the regime are currently limited. Most notably, political realities strongly suggest that the creation of a comprehensive, legally-binding compliance protocol for the BTWC is unlikely in the near term.

Nevertheless, limited progress is possible. In this regard, a politically realistic, practical approach would emphasize the adoption of a number of voluntary, *politically-binding* measures in the near term as well as the pursuit of measures aimed at enhancing the institutional capacity of the BTWC. It would also explore the possibilities inherent in more limited initiatives aimed at improving somewhat the BTWC's verification/compliance capabilities.

Properly pursued, such an approach to regime reform would offer not only a much-needed boost to the regimes credibility in the short term, but would lay the foundations for better oversight and development of the regime over the longer haul. The ultimate result would be a stronger, more robust regime and most importantly, a more effective barrier against the threat of biological and toxin weapons.