

Committee: The Security Council (SC)

Agenda Item: Countering cross-border terrorism; taking action against extremist groups possessing weapons of mass destruction

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Introduction

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have had a detrimental impact on diplomacy, infrastructure, and human lives since the term was first coined by Cosmo Gordon Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1937 during the bombing of the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. Nowadays, in the modern era, with the development of nuclear bombs, atomic bombs, and biological weapons, weapons of mass destruction have the ability to wipe out entire civilizations and destroy cities, regions, and even countries.

After the world moved on to utilizing new techniques of warfare after the United States (US) detonated the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which further led to the nuclear arms race and the Cold War, more and more nations entered the arms race to develop weapons of mass destruction. While Russia occupies the place to own the most WMD, 40 countries have either owned them in the past or own them currently.

At present, since the world is captivated by terrorism, WMDs are easy to obtain by militias. They have become a source of revenue and political leverage. The threat of destruction done by WMD has become made even more serious by the proliferation of WMD in the hands of these extremist groups. Conventional counterterrorism procedures become inadequate when non-state actors obtain these weapons, adding a new level of risk. Events such as Lashkar-e-Taiba's 2008 Mumbai bombings and the international activities of organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda demonstrate how terrorist networks use borders to destabilize areas. As seen by Aum Shinrikyo's 1995 sarin gas assault and ISIS's use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq, the danger increases when extremist groups obtain access to WMD.

To solve this issue, which has fatal consequences for the world as a whole if taken into bad hands, delegates must take into account international cooperation to strengthen border security, dismantle terrorist networks, and enforce non-proliferation frameworks.

Definition of Key Terms

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): Weapons capable of causing widespread death, destruction, and environmental damage. These include nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiological weapons.

Extremist Group: Non-state actors that employ radical ideologies and violent means to achieve political, religious, or social objectives.

Proliferation: The spread of weapons of mass destruction or their components, technologies, and expertise to states or non-state actors.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD): A Cold War-era doctrine stating that nuclear war would result in the complete annihilation of both the attacker and defender.

Radiological Weapons, “Dirty bombs”: Devices combining conventional explosives with radioactive material to spread contamination and cause panic, without nuclear detonation.

Dual-use Technology: Technology and materials that have legitimate civilian applications but can also be used for military purposes, including WMD development.

Arms control: Efforts to regulate or limit the development, stockpiling, and use of weapons to enhance global security.

Counter-proliferation: Strategies and actions aimed at preventing the spread of WMD and their delivery systems to unauthorized entities.

Major Actors Involved

Russia

Russia, the nation with the most WMD at hand, has had a relationship with them ever since the nuclear arms race began with the Soviet Union. Their proliferation, mainly due to the military-industrial complex of the Soviets, made the USSR one of the largest suppliers of advanced conventional and unconventional weapons to belligerent states during the Cold War. After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, a vast arsenal of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons was scattered across newly independent states. Although there were efforts, such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program to secure and dismantle these arsenals, gaps opened the door for materials to enter illicit markets. Additionally, this dissolution created economic problems for defense industries, making nations increasingly dependent on arms exports. Hence, Russia became a very important supplier of weapons in the global arms trade, selling advanced items to states with questionable human rights records and, in some cases, enabling the diffusion of military technologies to non-state actors. Despite these practices being economically motivated, they inadvertently fueled regional conflicts and raised the risk of terrorist access to WMD.

Russia remains one of the world's primary arms exporters, with its customers mainly being in nations that are trembling with civil wars or under militia control. For instance, Syria has been long receiving military support from Russia. Even though these transfers are supposedly intended to strengthen governmental defenses, according to reports, some weapons have been stolen by groups within Syria's broken conflict landscape, including extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra Front. Russia has also been reported to have sold Iran technology to promote Tehran's ballistic missile program, which could lead to indirect support of Hezbollah and other proxy groups. Therefore, Russia's mechanisms for controlling illicit arms transfers remain inconsistent, which could also be supported by the occurrence of state-manufactured weapons in the hands of the Chechen militants and other insurgent groups.

The stockpile of WMD in Russia creates a huge concern. If the proliferation is not limited, they can fall into the hands of terrorist groups directly, as it is supporting regimes like Assad's in Syria or aligning with Iran. The nation's stance on non-proliferation of WMD is highly paradoxical; despite its participation in international frameworks that limit the use of arms, like the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), its selective enforcement of these measures and vetoes in the UNSC prove a different policy. With the war with Ukraine at hand, the latter approach of the nation, where they would not be willing to limit the use, is predicted. This duality reflects Moscow's prioritization of strategic and economic interests over global norms.

The United States of America

Being the first nation to create and employ nuclear bombs during World War II, the United States has a complicated and contentious history with WMD. The sole known use of nuclear bombs in combat was in the 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which killed over 105,000 people and left behind extensive destruction. These bombs illustrated the devastating potential of WMDs and paved the way for the nuclear arms race. The United States continues to preserve and develop its nuclear arsenal despite having signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1968. To improve and extend its arsenal, the U.S. conducted 1,054 nuclear tests between 1945 and 1992.

The United States has been involved in the creation and testing of chemical and biological weapons in addition to nuclear weapons. Experiments with chemical agents like sarin and VX nerve gas were carried out during the Cold War, and sometimes they resulted in tragic incidents like the 1968 unintentional poisoning of 6,400 sheep close to the Dugway Proving Ground. Up to President Nixon's termination of offensive biological and chemical weapons projects in the 1970s, biological weapons programs—including studies into anthrax and other pathogens—were conducted.

The difficulties of meeting international disarmament commitments are demonstrated by the fact that, despite having ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the United States did not completely destroy its chemical weapons stockpile until 2023.

Iraq

The use of WMD by militants in Iraq remains a strong testament to showcase the consequences of leaving such weapons unsecured in unstable regions. During and after the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), terrorist groups scrambled the remnants of Saddam Hussein's chemical weapon programs to develop their campaigns of fear and destruction. For example, ISIS utilized the crisis in Iraq to gain control of sites like the Muthanna State Establishment, which contained degraded chemical weapons stockpiles. Though these weapons were not in optimal condition, they posed a significant threat when reused by non-state actors willing to use them against civilians and combatants alike.

The group used chlorine gas as a weapon against the Iraqi military and civilians after seizing control of disused chemical weapons facilities in 2014. Despite their crudeness, these attacks showed how even antiquated or homemade chemical weapons may have catastrophic bodily and psychological effects. This emphasizes the continuous threat that terrorist organizations present when they have access to the materials and expertise needed to create their own WMD programs or the remains of existing ones.

To combat this, firm responses to these groups have to be created, while also creating international frameworks that will put an end to this grim situation. Iraq's stance on this said non-proliferation from active development to firm commitment to disarmament over time. After the Gulf War and increased international pressures, Iraq decided to dismantle its WMD development programs in the 1990s and allowed the UN to conduct inspections to verify adherence.

Iraq ratified the NPT in 1969, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in 1991, and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 2009, formally promising to devote itself to diminishing its use and stock of WMD. Today, Iraq promotes a WMD-free Middle East and tries to disseminate its view to the whole world.

Pakistan

Pakistan, one of the nine countries that currently own nuclear weapons, has maintained rigorous safeguards over its nuclear arsenal and other WMD. However, the misuse of these weapons by terrorist groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban in Pakistan (TTP), Al Qaeda, and others can pose a huge threat to Pakistan's national security. These groups have long sought ways to obtain and exploit these arms to exert fear and control over the public. Hence, the Pakistani government should not bow down to fright and loosen its robust policies on keeping these weapons safe.

ISIS

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a transnational Salafi jihadist group that some nations name as a terrorist organization, actively portrays an interest in the use of WMD. The group represents one of the gravest threats to global security, as demonstrated in its continued attempts to acquire and utilize chemical, biological, and radiological warfare. They have used chemical arms such as chlorine and mustard gas in Iraq and Syria, where they not only target combatants but also civilians.

ISIS's interest also portrays a threat in the radiological field, where they utilize something referred to as "dirty bombs". Although they aim to create mass chaos rather than high casualties, the group's persistence and resourcefulness concern the world. Efforts by ISIS to recruit scientists and acquire materials from poorly secured facilities globally have raised alarms.

If vigorous counter-proliferation measures are not employed, the threat of the utilization of WMD will not only concern the Middle Eastern nations that ISIS tries to exert its influence on, but the whole world as a crisis in international security will occur.

North Korea

North Korea has engaged in a variety of illicit activities, including arms sales and proliferation of military technologies in the past. However, its direct provision of WMD to extremist groups remains a theoretical risk rather than a documented reality. The regime's history of state-sponsored terrorism and its established networks with illicit actors raise legitimate fears. North Korea's economic hardships that make them dependent on exports that they are not willing to conduct (excluding warfare) and geopolitical isolation have driven it to find unconventional ways to generate government revenue, yet the nation seems to put a restraint when it comes to WMD proliferation to non-state actors, due to fears of international backlash.

Although the nation is in financial desperation and the sale of WMD can put the economy back up, the costs outweigh the benefits. The chemical and radiological materials that make these arms could theoretically be transferred with plausible deniability, given their less trackable nature compared to nuclear weapons. However, the regime has historically prioritized the survival of its leadership and the continuity of its rule, and such transfers risk provoking severe sanctions, isolation, or even military action. Regarding this, giving another country or extremist group its own WMD would open North Korea to any possible attacks.

While the probability of North Korea directly arming extremist groups with WMD remains low, it is not impossible. Nonetheless, the possibility of “accidental” proliferation via corrupt government officials to create money for the government cannot be dismissed entirely.

General Overview of the Issue

Historical Background

To understand the effects of WMD use that have had a spillover impact on the utilization of them by extremist groups, first, historical details should be analyzed as more of them were used for warfare and scare tactics in the world during the mid and late 1900s.

The concept of weapons of mass destruction evolved over the 20th century and became one of the central concerns in global security and politics. Although at first, the term was highly correlated with nuclear weapons, regarding the unprecedented destructive capability of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Hence, during the Cold War (1947-1989), the term WMD became known as the nuclear arsenals, where “strategic weapons” were a euphemism for these detrimental weapons. The euphemism not only led to showcasing the uncertainties that would come with the nuclear age but the further change in the transformation of wartime tactics from on-site offense to mutually assured destruction (MAD).

The Cold War marked the initial fear of MAD. The United States and the USSR, with already strained relations due to the disagreements in the division of post-war Germany, Stalin’s aims for Eastern Europe, and the spread of communism with the Cuban Revolution, were on the brink of a nuclear war, with the Soviets possessing a missile ready to attack the US in Cuba, while the US had a missile waiting to be detonated in Turkey. The struggle between these superpowers pushed the nations to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962; however, both drew back the missiles in a secret agreement as they reached a deal after establishing a Moscow-Washington hotline to contact during emergencies that could affect the world as a whole. If both bombs were detonated, millions would be dead, and those who survived would live in a wreck sustained with radiation. Experts have deduced that by the end of the first year, the population would have dropped to half.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a rise in the use of the term WMD, which then started to include chemical and biological weapons in addition to nuclear weapons. This change took place during prominent world events, such as Israel's Operation Opera in 1981, which attacked Iraq's nuclear reactor under the name of halting the development of WMD. This preemptive measure, which came to be known as the "Begin Doctrine," portrayed the increasing concern over the proliferation of these arms. At the same time, chemical weapons received a lot of attention, particularly during the Gulf War in 1991, when Iraq's chemical and biological programs were an enormous source of concern for nations across the world. In addition to Iraq, the use of chemical weapons persisted in Asia, where Aum Shinrikyo, a Japanese doomsday cult, organized a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. This attack killed 13 and injured thousands and is regarded as the most infamous use of WMD by an extremist group. Regarding the fear of the extent to which the WMD could go, as it now started to even kill people without any warning, during this time, the phrase referring to the weapons of mass destruction was also used in discussions about disarmament and arms control, showcasing an effort to cease the use of these arms.

Now, with the start of a peace-aiming century, the 21st, where nations look back and see the destructive effects of war, a significant change in the perception of WMD occurs. After the September 11 terrorist attacks that took place with the subsequent anthrax attacks, where “letters containing anthrax spores were mailed to several news media offices and Senators Tom Daschle and Patrick Leahy, killing five people and infecting 17 others”, according to the FBI, in the US, the fear of unconventional WMD escalated. This fright escalated with the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the Gulf War, with justifications that the nation obtained WMD, where this allegation was nowhere to be true. The utilization of the term WMD in media and political discourse became a symbol of global insecurity, even extending to threats like cyber warfare. Proposals to classify cyber weapons as WMD reflect evolving understandings of mass destruction, although their applicability is debated, given the distinct nature of digital tools compared to traditional WMD.

As the world is moving closer and closer towards a wide-scale war with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and the occupation by terrorist groups like ISIS and Taliban, the possibility of the WMD that countries produce proliferated to terrorist groups increases. If not taken measures that the whole world would comply with, a huge disaster is near.

Current Use of WMD

As of 2024, extremist groups have not successfully deployed nuclear weapons; however, their pursuit of various forms of WMD remains a very important global security concern. These groups have shown interest in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials, seeking to develop or acquire such capabilities to amplify their destructive potential. For instance, in July 2024, a leader of the Eastern European accelerationist group Maniac Murder Cult (a neo-Nazi extremist group) was arrested for plotting to poison Jewish communities, where they dressed up as Santa to give out poisoned candy to racial minorities and Jewish children in New York City. Attempts like these concern biological and chemical warfare that could lead to more fatal consequences if they extend to a bigger scope.

Advancements in technology have further enabled these groups to explore new methods of attack. The sharp increase in 3D printing production has allowed for the creation of homemade firearms, such as the FGC-9, which has been found in the possession of neo-Nazi groups across Europe and used by rebel forces in conflicts like the Myanmar civil war. Additionally, extremists have exploited artificial intelligence to generate sophisticated propaganda and potentially develop malicious tools, as seen with neo-Nazi groups in the U.S. creating AI models to disseminate hate speech and radicalize individuals.

The international community continues to prioritize efforts to prevent extremist groups from acquiring WMD. Organizations such as the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre have partnered with various nations to enhance capabilities in countering the terrorist use of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive materials.

Despite these efforts, the evolving tactics of extremist groups, including the use of drone technology (especially influenced by the warfare used in the Russo-Ukrainian war) and cyber capabilities, present ongoing challenges that require continuous vigilance and adaptation of counterterrorism strategies.

Timeline of Important Events

Date:	Event:
August 6-9, 1945	The US drops the atomic bomb “Little Boy” on Hiroshima and “Fat Man” on Nagasaki.
August 29, 1949	The Soviet Union conducts its first nuclear test, "RDS-1."
July 1, 1968	The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is open for signature.
April 10, 1972	The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is open for signature, banning the development and stockpiling of biological weapons.
June 7, 1981	The Halabja chemical attack by Saddam Hussein’s regime kills thousands of Kurdish civilians.
January 16, 1991	The Gulf War begins, leading to revelations of Iraq's clandestine WMD programs.
March 20, 1995	Aum Shinrikyo conducts the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, killing 13 people and injuring over 5,000.
September 24, 1996	The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is open for signature.
September 11, 2001	Al-Qaeda conducts terrorist attacks on the U.S., leading to heightened fears of WMD terrorism.
October 15, 2001	Anthrax-laced letters are mailed to U.S. government officials, killing five

	people.
March 19, 2003	The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq begins, citing the dismantling of alleged WMD programs as justification.
February 4, 2004	The A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network is exposed, revealing sales of nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea.
August 21, 2013	The Syrian government used sarin gas in Ghouta, killing over 1,400 civilians.
September 3, 2017	North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test, believed to be a hydrogen bomb.
February 20, 2020	Reports emerge of extremist groups using cyber tools to target critical infrastructure related to WMDs.
January 23, 2024	Indian authorities intercept a dual-use shipment intended for Pakistan, heightening concerns about potential WMD proliferation.

Related Documents

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/410/16/pdf/n1541016.pdf>

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n14/663/46/pdf/n1466346.pdf>

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<https://press.un.org/en/2024/gadis3755.doc.htm>

Past Solution Attempts

Efforts to curb the proliferation of WMD have primarily focused on international treaties and conventions aimed at limiting their development, possession, and use. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), established in 1968, remains an integral part of global nonproliferation efforts by preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, while also promoting disarmament and peaceful nuclear energy. The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) were similarly pivotal in putting policies to outlaw the development, stockpiling, and use of biological and chemical weapons, although the BWC's lack of verification mechanisms remains a challenge. Treaties like the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and arms reduction agreements like the START treaties have further strengthened these efforts, though geopolitical tensions often hinder their full implementation.

To complement this, export control regimes and multilateral initiatives have played a crucial role. While the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) ensure that sensitive technologies are not misused for weaponization, organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitor compliance with nonproliferation agreements, conducting inspections to prevent illicit activities. Initiatives like the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programs have also enhanced global cooperation to secure vulnerable materials and put an end to illegal shipments, especially in regions prone to extremism.

Eradicating the trade and proliferation of WMD has become an issue that has long sought to be addressed after extremist attacks became more popular in the global political sphere. Hence, the OPCW has investigated and documented such uses, increasing accountability and global awareness.

Also, counterterrorism efforts such as the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), have strengthened international cooperation to prevent terrorist access to nuclear materials. Despite these measures, challenges persist, including the rapid advancement of dual-use technologies, enforcement gaps in treaties like the BWC, and geopolitical rivalries undermining collective action.

Possible Solutions

This issue needs a multifaceted approach to be addressed. Delegates need to find a comprehensive solution that would satisfy all of the nations in the world; if there is one country that owns WMDs that does not agree with the solution, then a huge threat to global security could occur. Keeping this in mind, if a policy plan is set up, there should be consequences for nations that do not abide by the rules after ratification. As can be seen by the report, some countries have signed the NPT, but their unstable nature makes it difficult to predict if they will produce WMDs.

Also, although production may be limited on paper after a policy change, delegates have to regard the fact that the nations may not apply the rules and continue proliferation and research secretly. When finding a comprehensive solution with the key factors described, supervision without breaching sovereignty is necessary.

Do not forget that in the UNSC, the permanent 5 nations (USA, Russia, China, France, UK) have the ability to veto clauses. Form your solutions in such a way that a ground for a veto will not be applicable.

Useful Links

- <https://www.nti.org/>
Nuclear Threat Initiative, where data on countries' past and present histories with WMDs are thoroughly explained.
- <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/nuclear-weapons-by-country>
World Population Review, where the country ranking by the number of nuclear weapons obtained is given.

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