

Call for Papers:

**The Biological Weapons Convention at 50:
Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future**

50 Years of the Biological Weapons Convention

The 50-year anniversary of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is an occasion to look at the past, present, and future of the Convention as well as the effect it has had on the field of arms control overall. The BWC represented a massive diplomatic achievement at the time of its conclusion, as it was the first arms control treaty that comprehensively banned an entire category of weapons. While marking a breakthrough, there were also significant aspects that were not incorporated in the Convention. Most notably the treaty lacked – and still lacks – a verification mechanism.

Since the adoption of the BWC there have been significant developments. Agreements on other weapon categories took stock of the BWC's lessons learned and implemented these in a similar and improved way. A prime example is the Chemical Weapons Convention, which comprehensively bans chemical weapons but also includes a verification mechanism.

In the past 50 years, scientific and technological innovation has also changed the material conditions of the field governed by the BWC. This has had significant effects on possible biological weapons programmes as well as on the mechanisms that could be employed to identify biological weapons use. In recent years the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has further pointed out the potentially catastrophic effects of biological agents, that might reach a similar magnitude, further confirming the importance of the prohibition of biological weapons and the development of the regime.

The BWC is currently at a precipice - while there are many challenges there is also potential for positive developments. Allegations of non-compliance with the BWC connected to the armed conflict in Ukraine have made clear that there are significant issues with the current framework of the Convention. Russia invoking Article VI BWC for the first time in the history of the BWC, has shown the potential for misuse as well as the political nature of this procedure. The mischaracterisation of biodefence programmes exemplifies problems emerging from a lack of transparency and mistrust and the potential for misinformation. At the same time, significant developments are being made with regard to national implementation and continued discussions on possible verification and compliance, showing potential for contributing to a more robust regime. Moreover, future developments might create both negative and positive impacts on the framework banning biological weapons. The technological discoveries continuously being made in the life sciences have the potential for future

biological weapons development, but at the same time, they can assist in the development of countermeasures.

This edited volume attempts to capture the variety of aspects described above and will be divided into three different sections, each seeking to address the Biological Weapons Convention from a different perspective.

Past

The first section of the book will look at the past, the negotiation history of the BWC, the development of the regime during the years it has been in force, and attempts, successful and unsuccessful, that have been made to expand the Convention.

Present

At the current moment, the BWC appears to be in flux with several important discussions and critiques ongoing. The conflict in Ukraine and the accusations of Russia that Western states are using laboratories in Ukraine and other states to pursue biological weapons programmes and the subsequent responses to this clearly show the dangers that exist towards the regime. At the same time, there is a significant prospective of development with states seeking to pursue progressive development of the current regime in light of technological developments as well as in response to the Covid-19 pandemic which showed the dangers of a potential biological weapons attack. Calls for a larger role of assistance and cooperation are voiced repeatedly but receive varying attention from states. The second section will comprise an analysis of the current state of the BWC and contemporary discussions, including the position of different regional groupings.

Future

The continued and accelerating development of bio-technology and biochemistry as well as changes of the international political landscape that could influence the BWC are likely to present significant challenges for the BWC regime. This raises questions of whether the BWC is currently positioned to address such challenges and what future developments are necessary for the BWC to remain effective. The third section will attempt to look forward, laying out potential challenges and recommendations to address these questions, while also engaging potentially beneficial effects of technological progress.

The 50th anniversary of the BWC presents an opportunity to take stock of the past, present, and future of the Convention through developing an edited volume discussing these aspects and looking ahead. In this context we are inviting paper proposals for chapters in the edited volume. Paper proposals should be no longer than 500 words in length. Submissions are welcomed from all relevant subjects and should link to one of the three sections. All submissions should be sent by 29 February 2024 together with a CV by email to: Barry.de-Vries@recht.uni-giessen.de