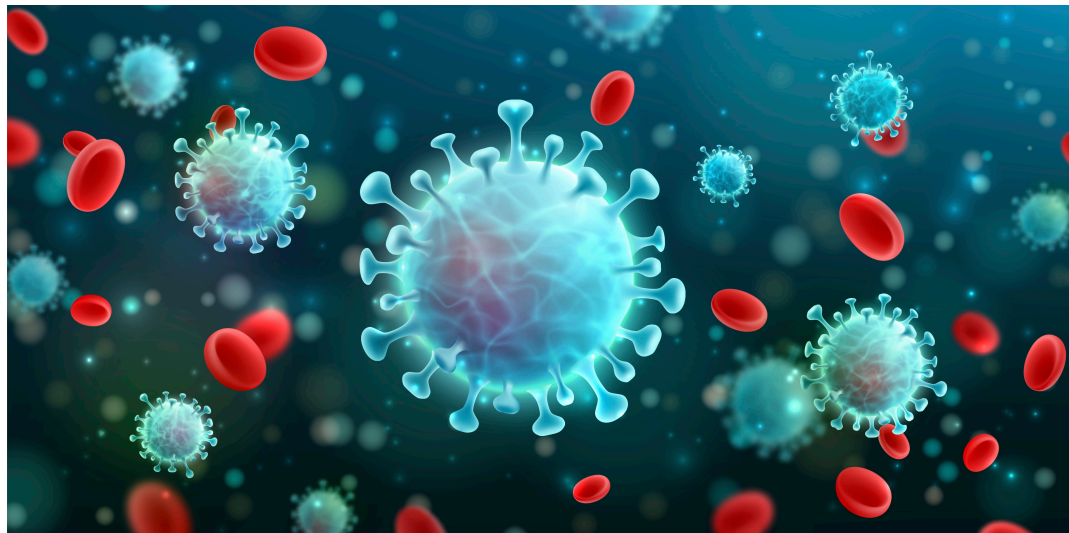




Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Executive summary: Security Taskforce

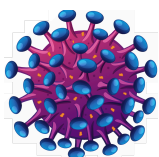


SEE: Danger of biological weapons

The pandemic has revealed weaknesses in global security

The pandemic shows both the destructive potential of an international biological attack and how unprepared national and international security institutions are to face one. Major studies carried out long before the crisis identified pandemics (natural or intentional) as a key threat to biosecurity.

Until now national and global biosecurity policies have been episodic and over-militarized. The present crisis shows that no country is fully prepared for an epidemic.

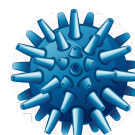
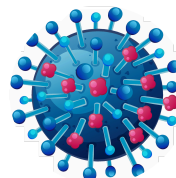


For example, the coronavirus has neutralized a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and raised concerns in the UK about the possibility of maintaining the Continuous At-Sea Deterrence. The crisis shows that large-scale biological pandemics can compromise even vital security assets.

As biological weapons could have a similar impact, the pandemic has exacerbated the risk that biological weapons could proliferate as states address perceived vulnerabilities.

The pandemic threatens international stability

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is the pillar of international biological arms control. Entered into force 40 years ago, it was the first multilateral treaty to ban a whole category of weapons of mass destruction. Under the BWC, states undertook 'never in any circumstances to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain' biological weapons, or their means of delivery, and to destroy all the weapons in their possession.

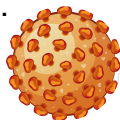


Pope Francis has asked the Vatican COVID-19 Commission to consider key issues arising from the pandemic and also to reflect on what new socio-economic-cultural approaches are needed to build a better future for everyone. This is the executive summary from Week 5 of the Commission's Security Taskforce.

Synthetic biology, 3D print weapons?

New technologies make it easier to proliferate biological weapons. We should not exclude the possibility that the next pandemic might not be of natural causes. Synthetic biology and 3D print technologies could expand the opportunities to create new biological threats. Increasing convergence of biology and chemistry could result in novel threats to national security. Dark-web information and second-hand lab equipment could enable individuals to create do-it-yourself weapons in a basement.

Even if 183 countries ratified the BWC, the risk of biological threats is still real in high conflict regions. A region of particular concern is the Middle East as neither Israel nor Egypt or Syria have ratified the BWC. The Convention cannot verify violations as there is no standing body to ensure its implementation.



In the absence of a competent authority, accusations that COVID-19 is a biological weapon have proliferated, increasing international tensions. These theories have gone viral, to the point that recent polls have shown that 23% of Americans and 17% of French believe the new coronavirus was created in a laboratory, despite the lack of evidence.



Nurses training in Liberia,
World Bank Photo
Collection

JUDGE: There is only one human family

Everything – everyone – is connected

The spread of the pandemic beyond national borders forces humanity to face its common vulnerabilities: there is only one human family. We are children of the one God, brothers and sisters with a common origin and a common destiny (*Gaudium et Spes* 24, 32, *Laudato Si'* 159, 202).

The natural origin of the pandemic reminds us once again that our humanity cannot be secure if we destroy the earth instead of living in harmony with it. Environmental protection is an ethical, spiritual and ecological concern – and a security concern.

Military security policies have proven to have very limited capacity to respond to these modern threats. The nations of the world must, instead, complete the shift from national security by military

Diseases do not respect borders so it is in everyone's interest that nations have robust health systems. In this regard, development is truly another name for peace and justice.

means to human security as the dominant concern of policy and international relations. Pope John XXIII signalled the need for this transformation by re-defining peace in terms of the recognition, respect, safeguarding, and promotion of the rights of the human person (*Pacem in terris*, 139).

The issue of biological weapons reminds us that technology may be dual use but is never neutral (*Laudato Si'* 114). Advances in science and technology and international cooperation and assistance are deeply interconnected.

ACT: Strengthen international controls on biological weapons to protect all humanity

- The next **Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference** will be held in 2021, and represents a great occasion for international diplomacy to promote biological disarmament. Member states and parties could explore the possibility of placing biological weapons under the **jurisdiction of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**, given the increasing convergence of biology and chemistry.
- Appropriate interventions by states that address the need for a much stronger and more cooperative approach to biosecurity are needed, so it is vital to reassert the importance of the **biological weapons taboo**, as international norms are constituted and shaped by words as well as actions.



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