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.

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.

**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 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.