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BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WEAPONS ARMS CONTROL IN THE MIDDLE EAST
Challenges and Opportunities for a WMD-Free Zone

David Friedman

Nonproliferation policies to prevent biological and chemical weapons use are important, but insufficient, particularly in view of the rise of global terrorism. Given the history of developing and using these weapons, it is crucial that governments properly prepare for biological and chemical threats, whether naturally occurring or man-made, such as by developing and managing effective healthcare infrastructure to mitigate widespread illness and injuries resulting from pandemics or terrorist attacks. Although the Middle East is one of the most sensitive and complex areas in the world—especially regarding regional arms control efforts and prevention—coordinating preparedness strategies among states in the region may be possible. Cooperatively addressing biological and chemical threats could lead to constructive progress towards the otherwise elusive goal of establishing a weapons of mass destruction-free zone in the Middle East.

KEYWORDS: Middle East; Israel; Iran; Syria; biological weapons; Biological Weapons Convention; chemical weapons

This article discusses biological and—to a lesser extent—chemical weapons threats and possible opportunities to cooperatively address them, particularly as they relate to the Middle East. Regional confidence-building measures to prevent and prepare for infectious disease pandemics—whether naturally occurring or manmade—is an area relatively ripe for regional cooperation, and could prove to be a major platform to enhance confidence-building and trust in the region, as well as a first step toward a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction.

The Biological and Chemical Weapons Threat

Biological weapons (BW) and chemical weapons (CW) appeared on the scene many years before nuclear weapons and, in fact, were used centuries ago. In the fourteenth century, the city of Belgrade managed to defeat the Turkish invaders by burning fabric soaked with poison to create a toxic cloud. Also in the fourteenth century, the Tartars used corpses infected with the bubonic plague to infect their Italian enemies, and in the eighteenth century, British forces spread blankets infected with smallpox among the Indians in North

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