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A Policymaker's Guide to Bioterrorism and What to Do about It

“The task of organizing the U.S. Government to address the risks of bioterrorism is critical, extraordinarily complicated and challenging, and immense in its scope.”

In a new National Defense University (NDU) report released today, Richard Danzig argues that preventing terrorist organizations from acquiring and using biological weapons and related materials is one of the most important challenges facing policymakers today. In this new report, Danzig describes the character and magnitude of the risk biological terrorism poses and identifies the factors that differentiate bioterrorism from other modes of terrorism. He comments on why biological terrorism has not yet emerged as an important instrument of terror and offers judgments about the likelihood of its manifestation.

According to Danzig, if bioterrorism were the only risk that we faced, it would be easier to organize and cope with it. “But this problem is perceived as one among many pressing priorities, and it is highly unlikely that any amount of advocacy will ever give it primacy before a catastrophic attack occurs.” We must recognize that, even with leadership interest at the highest levels and vigorous educative efforts, bioterrorism has remained and will continue to be a less than central issue on the national agenda until a catastrophic attack occurs.

Notwithstanding this situation, Danzig argues that preparations can be improved and that this is imperative because many items require long lead times. He offers ten recommendations for moving ahead, including developing an immediately usable, detailed plan for coping with catastrophic attacks in one city that is especially at risk, upgrading our abilities to assess aerosol attacks, and shaping the choices of those who might become bioterrorists.

According to Danzig, although these ten recommendations do not provide a comprehensive resolution to the risks of bioterrorism, it can provide a map to progress in many directions, offsetting the sense that there is no path to credible progress.

The report is available through this link: <http://www.ndu.edu/ctnsp/>

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