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The Logic of the Biological Warfare Terrorist: An Example from Afghanistan

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Title: The Logic of the Biological Warfare Terrorist: An Example from Afghanistan

Author: Editor

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Abstract. This article highlights the sequences of logic that can thwart counterterrorist analysis and operations and optimize the political benefits of a terrorist's biological warfare operations.

Recent journalistic accounts intimate that a "mysterious disease" observed in a remote part of Afghanistan might possibly be the consequence of a biological warfare (BW) operation. The multiplicity and complexity of the logical sequences that must be considered in arriving at such a determination are allies of the BW terrorist.

Is there a consistent set of symptoms? Even if there is, the set may have multiple causes--some BW-related, some not. Is there no consistent set of symptoms? Even if there is not, there may be just a single cause--e.g., a BW or non-BW cause--with different manifestations.

Is it helpful to compare the quality, incidence, and prevalence of a symptom outbreak with epidemiological history? Not as helpful as one might think. Consistency with history might suggest that the outbreak is a "natural" one. However, a BW planner might choose a BW agent that would induce symptoms consistent with a particular aspect of natural history. On the other hand, inconsistency with history might indicate something new in quality, incidence, and prevalence due not to BW but novel changes in mutation or vector mobility--the sorts of changes that have often enough been exemplified in the annals of medical history.

Can one obtain a "fix" on differentiating "natural" occurrence from BW operation based on social behavioral phenomena preceding a symptom outbreak? One problem is that the time lapse between introduction of a BW agent and a symptom outbreak can geometrically increase the number of phenomena that would have to be observed or identified and that might have a causal relationship with the outbreak. And these phenomena may be much more resistant to observation and identification than the Russian "yellow rain" that many experts believe was a form of trichothecene mycotoxins but others still insist was only bee feces.

Can the various political treaties, protocols, and conventions bearing on proscriptions of BW development, stockpiling, deployments, and employments contribute not only to the deterrence of BW operations but to their identification as well? To the contrary: the political, economic, and military fallout of going public with allegations--even those that seem overwhelmingly to be fact--militate against accurate identification. This impediment to identification is especially likely when bureaucracies with competing agencies and multiple turf battles within a fast-paced, ever-changing world are involved in the process. Something like this may have happened in some United Nations (UN) Security Council members' hesitance to support the UN Special Commission's findings on the Iraqi BW program.

Thus, the logical sequences that must be confronted by counter-BW authorities--the sequences of logic of the BW terrorist--render BW a more challenging analytic and operational problem than other weapons of mass destruction. These sequences also suggest that there may be a place for cognitive psychologists and philosophers in the BW counterterrorist effort. (See Biological warfare as

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