Understanding the threats of terrorism with CW

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The chemical threat spectrum

- War scenarios
- Terrorism
- Criminal acts

Consideration and availability of different chemical agents
  - Depends on intent
  - Depends on availability
  - Depends on technical skills and structure of the entity
Organising terrorism with biological agents for mass casualties

- Highly (vertically) integrated organisation
  - Charismatic leadership
- Skills required within organisation
  - Cannot be hired
  - Specialists must be convinced of organisation’s ideology
- Functional specialisation
  - Different steps in armament dynamic each require specific skills
  - Places burden on recruitment of specialists
  - Absence has major impact on armament dynamic and ability to deploy and use weapons
- Elaborate preparations needed (large footprint)
  - Research facilities
  - Testing ranges
  - Production units
- Logistical burden
  - Technology acquisition (high import dependency)
  - Weapon deployment
- Dissemination may be technologically most challenging
Alternative uses of chemical agents

- Against humans
  - Potential for mass casualties exists
    - Not necessarily most likely scenario as agents are difficult to acquire
  - Off-the-shelf toxicants
    - Poisons for individual assassination
    - Acid attacks
    - Property damage
    - Exploitation of vulnerabilities in the food chain

- Economic and societal disruption
  - Disruption functioning of utilities, enterprises, public agencies
  - Wider range of chemical agents available
    - Several can be commercially obtained (e.g., pepper spray & mace)
  - Exploitation of fear and lack of adequate preparations
  - Effectiveness of hoaxes

- Opportunistic use of industrial toxicants
  - E.g., chlorine attacks in Iraq (2007 – 09) and present allegations in Syria
Proliferation assessments
- After 11-09-01: sense of loss of control and manageability of problem
- Heavy manipulation of public information to serve political and institutional interests (official statements, press, novels, etc.)

Vulnerability assessments
- Almost exclusive focus on mass destruction and casualties
  - (Military) agents with potential of greatest destruction or casualties
  - Access to or availability of agents and equipment is important component of threat equation (e.g., ISIL & Iraq)
  - Single massive attack is usually underlying assumption.
- Emphasis on own weaknesses (only known factors)
  - Consequence management
  - Intelligence and detection
- Less debate of other factors in threat equation (many unknowns)
  - E.g., structure of the armament dynamic inside a terrorist organization
CBRN incidents

- Non-conventional weapon categories
  - Nuclear
  - Chemical
  - Biological
  - Radiological
  - Toxin

- Most incidents are in the grey areas
  - Toxins
  - Radiological materials

- Agents in grey areas are easier to acquire
  - Enable incidents involving individuals; small groupings
  - Opportunity may play a significant role in those incidents
Future major terrorist strike with CW cannot be excluded

However,

- The acquisition process is complex for most destructive agents
- CW are never acquired alone, but form part of a wider armament dynamic/strategy
- The armament process is not inevitable
  - Promoting factors
  - Counter-acting factors
  - Paradox: some promoting factors may actually contribute to the failure of the CW acquisition process (impact of feedback loops)
  - All entities that have pursued CBW have self-destructed

The ‘lesser’ agents in the armament dynamic

- Economic or environmental terrorism, assassination, and other (time-) limited goals
- They come within the capabilities of more groups or individuals
  - Lower demands on operational guidance
  - Acquisition also less demanding
  - Lower need for functional specialisation
- Less destructive (individual threats vs. societal/existential threats)
Recalling where science, industry and military art converged
Challenging entrenched positions

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