

**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Development,
Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their
Destruction**

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**Strengthening National Implementation: The United States
National Biodefense Strategy**

Submitted by the United States of America*Summary*

The United States of America's National Biodefense Strategy orchestrates the full range of activity that is carried out across the United States Government to protect the American people from biological threats. For the first time, efforts to address the full range of biological threats — whether naturally occurring or deliberate, domestic or international, and whether they threaten humans, animals, or plants — are being pursued in a single, coordinated framework. The Strategy outlines how the United States Government will manage its activities more effectively to assess, prevent, detect, prepare for, respond to, and recover from biological threats, coordinating its biodefense efforts with those of international partners, industry, academia, non-governmental entities, and the private sector. The tenets and goals of the Strategy are mirrored in much of the work of the BWC Meetings of Experts.

I. Introduction

1. The United States of America has adopted a new, holistic strategy coordinating all key aspects of the United States biodefense enterprise. Released on September 18, 2018, the National Biodefense Strategy (NBS) unites, for the first time, all activities conducted across the United States Government to protect the United States homeland from biological threats. The NBS and its accompanying implementation plan seek to ensure the United States can assess, prevent, detect, prepare for, respond to, and recover from biological threats, coordinating United States biodefense efforts with those of international partners, industry, academia, non-governmental entities, and the private sector. The United States National Biodefense Strategy can be found at this link – <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Biodefense-Strategy.pdf>



II. National Biodefense Strategy: Key Concepts and Assumptions

2. The NBS addresses biological threats regardless of cause, including: those that are naturally occurring, such as infectious disease outbreaks; those that are accidental, including those arising from inadvertent laboratory or sample transport release; and those that are deliberate, arising from proliferation by state or non-state actor efforts. The evolving biological threat landscape requires a comprehensive approach, underpinned by six key assumptions:

- **Biological Threats are Persistent:** International migration events, urbanization, and alteration of habitats have contributed to changes in both the geographic distribution of known pathogens and the emergence of novel pathogens. These developments are coupled with concerns about non-state actor or state interest in biological weapons.
- **Biological Threats Originate from Multiple Sources:** Biological threats can emanate from deliberate, accidental, and naturally-occurring sources.
- **Infectious Diseases Do Not Respect Borders:** Whether an intentional biological attack or a naturally occurring outbreak, increased global connectivity means that a biological threat in one country is potentially a biological threat to the whole world.
- **Science and Technology Will Continue to Advance Globally:** While rapid advances in biological science and technology have given rise to revolutionary innovations and developments, they have also increased the potential for intentional misuse.
- **Multi-sectoral Cooperation is Critical for Prevention and Response:** An effective biodefense enterprise requires coordination across all levels of the United States Government and with international partners. Domestic and international partnerships should foster coordination between key sectors, including law enforcement and security, media, academia, and others to ensure success.
- **A Multidisciplinary Approach Will Help Prevent Disease Emergence:** An effective biodefense enterprise also requires coordination across the human, animal, and plant sectors. Cross-coordination is critical to ensuring early detection of biological threats.

3. To address these threats and assumptions, the NBS is structured around five key goals, each of which is tied to specific objectives to foster a strengthened biodefense enterprise:

- **Goal 1: Enable risk awareness to inform decision-making across the biodefense enterprise:** The United States will build risk awareness at the strategic level, through analyses and research efforts to characterize deliberate, accidental, and natural biological risks; and at the operational level, through surveillance and detection activities to detect and identify biological threats and anticipate biological incidents.
- **Goal 2: Ensure biodefense enterprise capabilities to prevent bioincidents:** The United States will work to prevent the outbreak and spread of naturally occurring disease, and minimize the chances of laboratory accidents. The United States will also strengthen biosecurity to prevent hostile actors from obtaining or using biological material, equipment, and expertise for nefarious purposes, consistent with the United States Government's approach to countering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism. The United States will ensure we have the capabilities necessary to disrupt plots, degrade technical capabilities, and deter support for terrorists seeking to use WMD. This goal also recognizes the "dual use" nature of the life sciences and biotechnology, in which the same science and technology that improves health, promotes innovation, and protects the environment can also be misused. The United States seeks to prevent the misuse of science and technology while promoting and enhancing legitimate use and innovation.
- **Goal 3: Ensure biodefense enterprise preparedness to reduce the impacts of bioincidents:** The United States will take measures to reduce the impacts of bioincidents, including maintaining a vibrant national science and technology base to

support biodefense; ensuring a strong public health infrastructure; developing, updating, and exercising response capabilities; establishing risk communications; developing and effectively distributing and dispensing medical countermeasures; and preparing to collaborate across the country and internationally to support biodefense.

- **Goal 4: Rapidly respond to limit the impacts of bioincidents:** The United States will respond rapidly to limit the impacts of bioincidents through information-sharing and networking; coordinated response operations and investigations; and effective public messaging.
- **Goal 5: Facilitate recovery to restore the community, the economy, and the environment after a bioincident:** The United States will take actions to restore critical infrastructure services and capability; coordinate recovery activities; provide recovery support and long-term mitigation; and minimize cascading effects elsewhere in the world.

III. National Biodefense Strategy: Governance and Implementation

4. Implementation of the NBS is coordinated and monitored through the Biodefense Steering Committee (BSC), chaired by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and comprising the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Attorney General, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the heads of other agencies with responsibilities pertaining to biodefense. This BSC, which is led by the President and coordinated by National Security Council staff, is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the NBS, as well as ensuring the United States federal Government's coordination with all relevant domestic and international government and non-government partners. The work of the BSC will be assisted by a technical level Biodefense Coordination Team (BCT), headquartered at the Department of Health and Human Services. The BCT is tasked with preparing an annual Biodefense Assessment, which will initially focus on improving understanding of the existing United States Government biodefense enterprise's capabilities and capacities. This information shall be used to develop a public report to keep the American people informed of the United States Government's efforts to prevent or mitigate the impact of biological threats. More detailed information on the implementation of the NBS is available in *Support for National Biodefense*, National Security Presidential Memorandum – 14 (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-support-national-biodefense/>).

IV. Relationship of the NBS to the BWC

5. The NBS posits that “Biological threats — whether naturally occurring, accidental, or deliberate in origin — are among the most serious threats facing the United States and the international community.” Preventing deliberately created biological threats is, of course, one of the primary concerns of BWC States Parties. The NBS is designed to coordinate all relevant United States biodefense activities, and many of its specific goals and corresponding objectives align closely with the purposes of the BWC. Examples include:

- Objective 1.2: Ensure that domestic and international biosurveillance and information-sharing systems are coordinated and are capable of timely bioincident prevention, detection, assessment, response, and recovery. **MX1, MX4**
- Objective 2.1: Promote measures to prevent or reduce the spread of naturally occurring infectious diseases. **MX4**
- Objective 2.2: Strengthen global health security capacities to prevent local bioincidents from becoming epidemics. **MX3**
- Objective 2.3: Deter, detect, degrade, disrupt, deny, or otherwise prevent nation-state and non-state actors' attempts to pursue, acquire, or use biological weapons, related

materials, or their means of delivery. It is important to note that a specific aspect of meeting this goal of the Strategy is reinforcing the obligations in the BWC. **MX1, MX2, MX3, MX4, MX5**

- Objective 2.4: Strengthen biosafety and biosecurity practices and oversight to mitigate risks of bioincidents. **MX1, MX2, MX3, MX4**
- Objective 3.1: Ensure a vibrant and innovative national science and technology base to support biodefense. **MX2**
- Objective 3.3: Develop, exercise, and update prevention, response, and recovery plans and capabilities. **MX4**
- Objective 3.9: Strengthen international preparedness to support international response and recovery capabilities. **MX4**
- Objective 4.1: Compile and share biothreat and bioincident information to enable appropriate decision-making and response operations across all levels of government and with non-governmental, private sector, and international entities, as appropriate. **MX1, MX4**
- Objective 5.4: Reduce the cascading effects of international biological incidents on the global economy, health, and security. **MX1, MX3, MX4**

6. The NBS recognizes that effectively preventing and responding to a biological threat requires cooperation not only across the United States Government (cooperation that will be significantly enhanced by the Strategy), but also with our international partners. As the NBS states, biological threats do not respect borders. Thus, the purposes and goals of the National Biodefense Strategy and implementation of the BWC are mutually reinforcing.
