

Global Biosecurity: Towards a New Governance Paradigm

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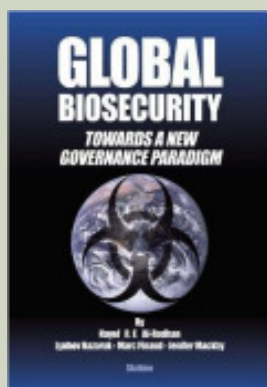
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Summary

The rapid scientific advancements of the life sciences, nanotechnology and biotechnology have brought along certain challenges for not only the scientific community but also the policy makers.



In the 21st century, biosecurity has taken an important position in the global policy-making agenda. The rapid scientific advancements of the life sciences, nanotechnology and biotechnology have also brought along certain challenges for not only the scientific community but also the policy makers. Subsequently, challenges of proliferation of biological weapons and bioterrorism have brought forward the need to create a global public policy community to consider these threats as a major global security concern. Given the complexity and multiplicity of the threats related to biosecurity, it is vital to look at these issues through a global perspective and construct a transnational governance system capable of properly addressing the issue. Biological threats and biosecurity loom large as key points of concern for international security in the near future. The dual-use character of materials, the relative ease and availability of agents needed, the high risk of proliferation and the rapidly developing field of biotechnology present a challenge to the international community, calling for a strong institutionalisation of governance policy at the global level, an increased transparency and information sharing and a strong export control regime. Although the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) has established a foundation for transnational cooperation on biological safety and security, global legislation on these issues is fragmented and inconsistent. It does not address the difficulties and hurdles that stifle international cooperation for creating a global governance regime for biosecurity and biosafety.

Global Biosecurity aims to inform both policymakers as well as the general public on the key developments and trends in the field of biosecurity, giving the reader an insight into not only the technological

advancements but also the diverse aspects of biological threats and risks. It situates biosecurity as a considerable threat to international peace and security, drawing the reader's attention to the multiple discourses of biosafety and biosecurity. It goes on to present an analytical framework and a historical perspective for a better comprehension of the threats and risks it poses to humanity. It also highlights the dual-use nature of technology and the possibility of misuse of life sciences and biotechnology.

As with any other technology, biotechnology has the ability to be both constructive and destructive; it is the intent to use scientific discoveries aimed at bettering humanity for malicious purposes and availability of possibly harmful information that causes the greatest security risk. This also opens up the debate on information sharing and forces us to revisit the idea of openness of scientific information and its close links to national security. This is probably the greatest hurdle in the path for achieving a global governance policy on combating threats of biosecurity. The authors underline the need for global oversight of research and sharing of such 'sensitive' information. Moreover, they address the ethical implications of new technologies and stress for an open dialogue between experts, decision makers and the general public to ensure transparency and accountability and to avoid the misuse of technology.

While offering the reader a detailed analysis of the existing norms for the control of biological threats at both the national as well as the international levels, the authors have also discuss the major multilateral legal instruments like the Geneva Protocol, the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention, the exports control regime, the G8 Global Partnership and the International Committee of the Red Cross, that aim at controlling and countering the hostile use of

biotechnology to create 'weapons of mass effect'. While detailing the various international and national responses to bioterrorism and use of biological weapons, it brings up the various problems faced by governments and international organisations in combating this threat.

The authors conclude by presenting a new roadmap for global biosecurity governance, calling for a deeper understanding and scholarship of the issue. They propose to establish a global biosecurity network (GBN) that could offer effective solutions through active engagement of all important actors from both governments and nongovernmental organisations to private industry, science and academia as well as involvement from the general public. This proposal aims at multi-stakeholder dialogue and the creation of a common understanding to design a global biosecurity strategy to ensure safety and security against biological threats. The authors present simple albeit ambitious proposals for guaranteeing global biosecurity that need to be taken into consideration by the international policy community.

The book not only presents a widespread and well researched review of the various facets of biosecurity, it also outlines the measures taken across the world for countering biological threats and identifies gaps where further action needs to be taken. It puts forward comprehensive recommendations to policy makers for creation of a global biosecurity network and urges collaborative study and analysis for a better understanding of the problems faced by the biosecurity regime. Despite the fact that the proposals offered by the authors seem to be idealistic and ambitious, it would be beneficial for policy makers to use them as a reference point and try implementing them over time. The book is an excellent reference document that could be a tremendous help to academics and policy makers alike.