Global Civil Society and Chemical and Biological Warfare

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Outline

- how governments and civil society have framed the issue of CBW
- relate this to the real-world failure of civil society to counter the “WMD hype” in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq
- explain why civil society played this largely reactive role
- outline how civil society might avoid repeating this failure in future
The 3 CBW frames

• How an issue is framed influences how civil society addresses it & issue’s ‘resonance’ with the public

• 3 ways in which governments & civil society have framed CBW since the 19th century:
  – ‘Taboo’
  – ‘WMD’
  – ‘CB terrorism’

• Presented chronologically, but much overlap between each
The ‘taboo’ frame

- Cross-cultural & ancient taboo
- Until 19th century, CB agents used mainly for covert acts but in 19th century industrialization of chemistry & application to mass warfare
- Taboo first codified in late 19th and early 20th centuries, but ignored with massive use of CW by all sides in WWI
- After WWI, public hostility to CW contributed to further codification with the 1925 Geneva Protocol
- However, CW widely used between the wars
- CBW not used in WWII but discovery of nerve gases & developments in aerobiology
The ‘WMD’ frame (1)

- Recent statements state term ‘WMD’ is new …
  - “the use of this term to describe all three types of weapons is recent and controversial” Dan Plesch, The Guardian, 7 January 2003
  - “more recently, …, WMD has been expanded to include chemical and biological weapons”, Philip Morrison & Kosta Tsipis, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, May/June 2003
  - “the very phrase ‘weapons of mass destruction’ is of recent coinage” Geoffrey Wheatcroft, The Guardian, 2 May 2003
- … but actually dates from 1940s with UN attempts to devise a “system for the regulation of armaments”
The ‘WMD’ frame (2)

- Firmly embedded in “state security discourse” in which states monopolize the use of force & limit civil society participation in negotiations (de Larrinaga & Turenne Sjolander)
- Conceptualizes all ‘WMD’ as a threat to state survival
- Product of the developed world, abstract & technically complex, lacks resonance in developing world
- Generic solution is the negotiation & implementation of multilateral treaties between states (the ‘Geneva process’)
The ‘WMD’ frame (3)

- Cold War – extensive national CBW programmes, CW use in 3 conflicts, USSR covert BW programme
- CWC negotiations eventually finalized in window of opportunity created by end of Cold War
- 1990s was zenith of ‘WMD’ frame for CBW with the entry into force of CWC, BWC protocol negotiation & practical experience of inspections in Iraq & Russia/ US/ UK
- ‘WMD’ frame ended in 2001 with collapse of BWC protocol negotiations following its rejection by the US and reaction to 9-11
The ‘CB terrorism’ frame

• Overlaps with ‘WMD’ frame but much more relevant since 9-11 & anthrax attacks
• Also firmly embedded in ‘state security discourse’
• Since 9-11, terrorism & CBW explicitly linked by US and UK governments to form a “nexus of proliferation and terrorism” (Jason Ellis, Washington Quarterly, Spring 2003)
• US response emphasizes national measures and military force, epitomized in concept of ‘homeland security’, example of “regressive globalization”
• In the ascendancy since 9-11 and particularly in evidence in 2002/03
2002/03 WMD hype

- Hugely increased attention to ‘WMD’ by leaders since 9-11 & anthrax letters
- Two existing separate threads …
  - WMD & terrorism
  - WMD & Iraq
- … drawn together by US & UK during ’02 with Iraq as one front in ‘war on terrorism’
- Civil society failed to interest mainstream media in inconsistencies, omissions & inaccuracies in official message
WMD hype: Basic assumptions (1)

• **Iraq possesses WMD:**
  - “The threat is not imagined. The history of Saddam and WMD is not American or British propaganda. The history and the present threat are real”, Tony Blair, 24 Sept 02

• **Taken as fact by the media:**
  - “By the time the war against Iraq began, much of the media had been conditioned to believe, almost as an article of faith, that … Iraq was bulging with chemical & biological weapons”, Seth Ackerman, Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, Extra!

• **But:**
  - “I don’t know is the answer. … We just have to wait and see”, Tony Blair 11 Jan 04
WMD hype: Basic assumptions (2)

- **Iraq’s WMD pose an “imminent” threat:**
  - “a current and serious threat to the UK national interest”, Tony Blair, HMG Iraq dossier

- Government’s objective to play up urgency of dealing with the threat

- Best example is infamous 45-minute claim which was leapt upon by the media
45 MINUTES FROM ATTACK

Dossier reveals Saddam is ready to launch chemical war strikes
BRITS 45 mins FROM DOOM
Cyprus within missile range

NUCLEAR BOMBS  HUMAN RIGHTS  SADDAM’S HEIR

ATTACK

BRITISH authorities said the situation in Cyprus could be destabilized if gas was to be launched by Iraq. It was reported.

Attacked

DEBT

ARMS HIDDEN AT 'ROYAL PALACES'

ATTACK

BBC/4/0103
SADDAM CAN STRIKE IN 45 MINUTES

- Nuclear attack possible in under one year
- Anthrax missiles hoarded by Iraqi tyrant
- Europe within range of blitz by Scuds

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WMD hype: Basic assumptions (2)

- Iraq’s WMD pose an “imminent” threat:
- government did not dissuade media from highlighting 45-minute claim
- Government did not reveal that claim applied to battlefield CW
- Also now know that dossier was revised to highlight imminence of threat
• “It is a damning indictment of the level of public understanding about these matters that this claim was allowed to metamorphise into a demonstration of imminent threat from Iraqi WMD”, Steve Pullinger, Disarmament Diplomacy, Oct/Nov 03

• “The press and the public came to alarming conclusions. … Two witnesses to the inquiry said, with much pain, that it was not their fault if the press misinterpreted them. That is absurd. One writes in order to be understood by one's audience. The JIC and Downing Street have only themselves to blame if the public failed to grasp what they were trying to say”, Sir Roderic Braithwaite (JIC Chairman 1992-93), Chatham House, 5 Dec 03
WMD hype: Basic assumptions (3)

- **Iraq has links to terrorism:**
  - On eve of invasion, Blair said combination of terrorism & WMD was “a real & present danger to Britain & its national security”
  - General climate of fear & paranoia generated by media reports on alleged terrorist groups
  - Media relied on unofficial government briefings creating “absurdly circular” reporting (Martin Bright, evidence to SIAC hearing, 21 Jul 2002)
  - “joint police-press operations” (Campaign Against Criminalising Communities), ie London ricin linked to Iraq
Hype without foundation?

- US/UK conducted a ‘strategic influence campaign’ to persuade public of need for invasion (Sam Gardiner, Truth From These Podia, Oct 03)
- Many pre-invasion intelligence claims now shown as false, i.e. ISG’s interim progress report on Iraqi CW
- In the US, “Administration officials systematically misrepresented the threat from Iraq’s WMD and ballistic missile programs” (Carnegie Endowment, WMD in Iraq: Evidence & Implications, Jan 04)
- In the UK, the JIC “entered the Prime Minister's magic circle. ... Its members went beyond assessment to become part of the process of making and advocating policy” (Braithwaite)
‘WMD’ as spurious concept

- Term ‘WMD’ massively used pre-invasion by media & politicians with little attention to definition
- Lumps together 3 very different weapons
- Only true ‘WMD’ is a nuclear weapon, although some think BW could come close to NW
- Inclusion of CBW in ‘WMD’ made military action easier to justify
- Simplification attractive to media & useful to government
Civil society’s failure

- Unable to counter US/UK ‘strategic information campaign’
- Failed to explain problems with simplified concept of WMD
- Unable to present alternative view of Iraq’s WMD, despite many concerns being subsequently borne out
- Played a largely reactive role in dealing with the media
- Why?
Civil society in CBW?

- “Global civil society has not been active in the CBW arena. A small group of specialized NGOs almost exclusively in the North have been. Whether or not you call this largely academic group civil society depends on your definition; but its worth noting the restricted base - these are not ‘civil society organizations’ in the way in which the word is typically used.” (Edward Hammond, Sunshine Project)

- “[T]he sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks and individuals located between the family, the state, and the market, and operating beyond the confines of national societies, polities, and economies.” (Anheier, Glasius & Kaldor, Global Civil Society 2001)
Character of CBW civil society

• Good example of an ‘epistemic community’ common to other areas of civil society activity …
• … but no associated advocacy network unlike other areas
• Largely academic, elite insiders based in Western universities & think-tanks, many ‘insiders’ but few ‘outsiders’
• Good continuity & contacts, but risk-averse & largely isolated from other sections of global civil society
• Relatively untouched by ‘90s developments in wider global civil society
Activities of CBW civil society (1)

• Reflects nature of the organizations & individuals involved & the centrality of the state in ‘WMD’ & ‘CB terrorism’ frames:
  - marginalized in agenda-setting & denied access to most international negotiations & meetings regarding CBW
  - more active with regard to normative aspects of CBW, acts as guardian of original intent of treaties & taboo
  - Main focus is provision of information and expertise, main target audiences are: policymakers & diplomats; other civil society actors; media; general public
Activities of CBW
civil society (2)

• Cont’d:
  - Little public advocacy & mobilization: “We have excellent subject-matter experts, but don’t know how to do outreach” (Hammond)
  - Some success with lobbying, but another activity which does not come naturally
  - No direct participation in the formulation of treaties given ‘state security discourse’, but indirect transmission of ideas, i.e. through Pugwash
  - Exploited minimal existing opportunities for monitoring, perhaps increasing by Sunshine Project & BWPP
Access and funding

- Access to negotiations & meetings is “almost invariably at the lower end of the spectrum” compared to other areas (Simon Carroll, Disarmament Forum, 2002)
- Lack of direct access sometimes balanced in other ways
- Funding situation worsened in ’90s with huge reduction in foundations
- CBW civil society fared badly because of reluctance to divert funding from nuclear disarmament
- Lack of funding restricts activities & entrance of new talent into CBW civil society
Challenges for CBW civil society

• Involvement of civil society in CBW now in transformation with 4 driving forces:
  - apparent end of multilateral treaty-making
  - heightened public awareness of CBW
  - developments elsewhere in civil society
  - creation of an alternative frame for CBW

• Some have occurred before, but novelty now is combination
Avoiding another failure

• CBW needs to be re-framed:
  - threat to global security & return to taboo
  - linkages to biodiversity & public health
  - introduction of individual responsibility

• Pay more attention to public education

• Be more proactive in responding to events

• Reach out to other civil society actors