



# **EAST AFRICA AND THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT**

**BY**

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# WHAT IS BIOTERRORISM?

- This refers to the use of unconventional weapons including biological pathogens (Biological agents and germs) to commit terrorist attacks.
- Biological warfare and bioterrorism mean the intentional use of microorganisms or toxins derived from living organisms as an act of war or political violence with the intent to cause death or disease in humans, animals or plants
- A bioterrorist attack would probably involve the covert release of microbial pathogen that would give rise to detectable illness only after a symptomatic delay or incubation period, when the microorganism is multiplying in the host to cause disease e.g. the bacterium that cause anthrax has an incubation period of roughly six days<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> <http://cns.miis.edu/research/cbwtestuck.htm> accessed 1/11/2007

# WHAT IS BIOTERRORISM?...

- East Africa and the world at large is unaware of bioterrorism and therefore unprepared for bioterrorist attacks<sup>[2]</sup>
- The threat of Bio Terrorism is growing and East African nations are not adequately prepared to handle even a medium sized biological attack
- Bio Weapons threaten thousands of casualties in addition to other disastrous long term consequences.
- Criminal networks can covertly transport lethal agents across East African borders and terrorists have already proven that anthrax can be fatally deployed.

<sup>[2]</sup> [http //www .interpol. int/public/Bio Terrorism/default.asp](http://www.interpol.int/public/Bio_Terrorism/default.asp)

# WHAT IS BIOTERRORISM?...

- Bio –technology is undergoing rapid evolution, the wide dissemination of developments is already proving difficult to manage.
- There is evidence that terrorist organizations have a heightened interest in the use of biological weapons, establishing terrorist support cells in different regions around the world with the ability and motivation to carry out attacks[3]
- Biological weapons are potentially devastating and much easier to make, transport than nuclear weapons, are virtually undetectable and easy to transport by an individual and can be propagated in large quantities.
- Recognizing the imminent dangers represented by this lethal form of crime is the first step in countering the threat.

# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?

- The region is the most vulnerable to international terrorism on the continent. The 1998 simultaneous bombings of the U.S Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania showed that East Africa is vulnerable and a terrorist target.
- As early as World War 1 Bio weapon application was introduced in East Africa British troops shot and placed animal carcasses on water, poisonous plants etc to restrict German East African Forces' movements and keep the waters for themselves (JP Dudley -2002)
- Newly identified diseases and known but formerly uncommon ones are emerging in the region as a major threat to both human beings and animals e.g. Ebola first discovered in DRC IN 1976 re-surfaced which in 2001 attacked 425 patients in Uganda and killed 224 (53%) including their Nurses and Doctor (Bio- terrorism e-mail module 9 June 2003)
- Rift valley fever virus a disease for cattle, sheep , goats buffalo and camels was discovered in Kenya in 1931 and is reported to have resulted in the deaths of 100,000 sheep ( Bioterrorism e-mail module 9 June 2003)

# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT? ...

- Yellow fever, foot and mouth disease, rinder pest, bad flu, are all a threat to both human beings and animals
- Small pox described as one of the greatest scourges of man kind has also had devastating effects in East Africa
- According Interpol Al Qaeda posted instructions on how to make Bio weapons on its website and this was confirmed after the arrest of Khalid Sheik Mohammed a key Al Qaeda operative who was found with documents and computer hard drives ,training materials that discussed the use of Bio weapons[4]
- Though S.3 UN Resolution 1540 urges member states to take effective measures to establish domestic controls to prevent biological weapons East Africa has not domesticated this resolution.

[4] Paper Presented by Ronald Noble SG Interpol at The African Workshop on the Prevention of Bio Terrorism on 21st November 2005

# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?....

- Of the disease agents researched during the 20th Century for their application in biological warfare over 50% are endemic in East Africa, meaning that terrorists, criminals or other entities might use the region as their supply source.
- West Nile virus was discovered in Uganda in 1937 , killed birds and human beings( [new dawn magazine.com](http://newdawnmagazine.com))
- Influenza A , and Avian strains have been reported to infect chicken, turkeys and its from these that human beings get it (ibid)
- SARS –Severe Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome is also reported to be a threat to East Africa ( [www. bio terrorism. uab.edu](http://www.bio.terrorism.uab.edu))

# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?....

- Human monkey pox disease spread by monkeys and rodents is also a threat to the region (ibid)
- The region has previously suffered from infectious diseases such as small pox and this could still be spread by terrorists. Moreover the origin of HIV that has terrorized the region and the world at large is still unknown could also have been the work of bioterrorists?
- Terrorists might escalate their horrific campaign of death and destruction by resorting to use of unconventional weapons, infectious diseases to plants, animals and human beings.
- Zoonotic diseases i.e. those that originate in animals and infect human beings e.g. brucellosis can easily be developed as biological warfare in East Africa if not checked.

# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?....

- The backbone of East African countries is Agriculture, agricultural resources should also be considered potential targets of warfare this would be very disastrous to the economic and social survival as some of the epidemics can be transmitted from plants to animals e.g. chicken flu, mad ,cassava mosaic, banana wilt, foot and mouth disease mad cow disease etc.
- Agro terrorism might be intended to extort money from Government, force policy changes ,but would in turn reduce production, economic loss ,loss of revenue, create social instability etc.
- Depletion of flora and fauna which is a tourist attraction that boosts the economies in the region

# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?....

- The experience of the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo which released nerve gas in Tokyo in 1995 and tried to obtain haemorrhagic fever in Zaire after some individuals contacted the disease in 1992 shows that the East African region is not safe from Bio terrorism threats.
- There is no legal and regulatory frame work in the region for early investigation and prosecution of suspects of Bio-Weapons.
- Though the region has scientific laboratories there is no discussion with specialists on security issues such as laboratory security, bioterrorism identification and assessment.
- Plotters of biological attacks can use the region because of its laxity and strike societies elsewhere.


# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?....

- East Africa lacks expertise in detecting and checking on the publicly available materials that could be used to manufacture biological weapons.
- Terrorists might recruit scientists engineers formerly employed a state level bio warfare program such as that of Iraq, former Soviet Union and deploy them in East African to execute their mission because of the laxity in the region.
- HIV which has had devastating effects in the region is believed to have been introduced in East Africa ( new dawn magazine .com )
- There is also the lack of extensive experience in this area, lack of understanding of the nature of the threat.


# IS EAST AFRICA VULNERABLE TO THE BIO TERRORISM THREAT?....

- The raising numbers of tourists to the region can be abused by terrorists to introduce disease vectors and microbial pathogens like anthrax, plague, tularemia etc.
- Kenya reported to have developed a maize variety resistant to the larger grain borer a pest that feeds on stored grains ( [www. scidev. net](http://www.scidev.net))
- Interestingly LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony who is sought for terrorists' acts he has committed in Uganda, refused to receive \$20000 that had been donated to the group to buy food by the Government of Southern Sudan citing fears of Anthrax which is reported to have been developed by German during World War 1 ( J.P Dudley)

# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO FIGHT BIO TERRORISM IN EAST AFRICA?

- Raise awareness of the threat
  - Strength the legal frame work by criminalizing Bio Terrorism
  - Enhance co-operation between public health officials, customs and law enforcement and additionally between international organizations.
  - Provide regional capacity building training programs for appropriate responses to bioterrorist attacks.
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# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO FIGHT BIO TERRORISM IN EAST AFRICA?...

- The police and other law enforcement officers should be adequately trained and equipped to deal with the threat.
  - Domestication UN Security Council Resolution 1540 on the Prevention of the proliferation of nuclear , chemical and biological weapons as well as other means of delivery.
  - Enhance border security ,interdepartmental international and cooperation
  - Enhance coordination of efforts on national, sub regional, regional and international levels in order to strengthen a global response to bio terrorism
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# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO FIGHT BIO TERRORISM IN EAST AFRICA?...

- Promote the universal adoption and full implementation of multilateral treaties for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear , biological or chemical weapons.
- Ratify and domesticate Prohibition of chemical Weapons and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
- Develop biosecurity policies to mitigate the deliberate destructive use of biological agents, knowledge and techniques.
- Governments, Parliamentarians ,scientists should prevent biotechnology warfare.

# CONCLUSION

East Africa is vulnerable to the Bioterrorism threat and efforts should be made to prevent its occurrence. The region should take appropriate any threat of chemical and biological weapons.

**Thank you for listening to me!**

**End**