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National Counterproliferation and Biosecurity Center

The National Counterproliferation and Biosecurity Center (NCBC), originally established by Congress in 2005 as the National Counter Proliferation Center (NCPC), is one of three mission centers within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), along with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC).

Since its establishment, NCBC has been the primary U.S. intelligence organization managing the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence on the proliferation of nuclear, biological, radiological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMD), their technologies, materials, expertise, and delivery systems.

In the context of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Congress has expressed interest in improving collaboration among experts inside and outside the government on matters relating to public health emergencies. Congress enacted Section 401 of the Intelligence Authorization Act (IAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 (Division X of P.L. 117-103) to provide NCPC with a new biosecurity mission. This provision amended the National Security Act of 1947 to rename NCPC as the National Counterproliferation and Biosecurity Center, and expanded the Center's authorities to include management of intelligence on "emerging foreign biological threats, including diseases with pandemic potential."

Background

The rationale for establishing an intelligence center dedicated to managing and integrating intelligence on proliferation of WMD developed from incidents that underscored the threat to U.S. national security of terrorists using these weapons. In 1995, the Aum Shinrikyo sarin nerve agent attack on the Tokyo subway, which killed 14 people and wounded thousands, led to President William J. Clinton to issue Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 39, *U.S. Policy on Counterterrorism*. PDD 39, in part, directed government departments and agencies to take protective measures against terrorist use of WMD and stated that:

The United States shall give the highest priority to developing effective capabilities to detect, prevent defeat and manage the consequences of nuclear, biological or chemical (NBC) materials or weapons use by terrorists.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (the "9/11 Commission") recommended establishing a national intelligence center to manage intelligence related to WMD proliferation. On February 6, 2004, in response to the debate over the apparently erroneous 2002 intelligence assessment that Saddam Hussein possessed chemical weapons at that time, President George W. Bush signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13328 establishing the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (the "WMD

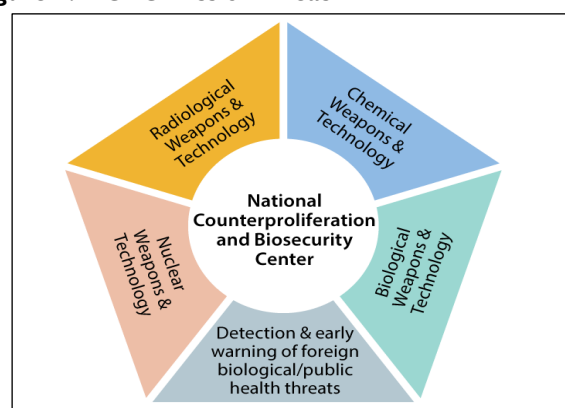
Commission"). Among the Commission's recommendations included establishment of a National Counter Proliferation Center to play a "management and coordination function by overseeing analysis and collection on nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons across the Intelligence Community." Acting on the Commission's recommendation, Congress established the National Counterproliferation Center in 2005 through a provision of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) of 2004 (P.L. 108-458, codified as 50 U.S.C. §3057).

NCBC Overview

The Director of National Intelligence (DNI) appoints the NCBC director, who reports directly to the DNI. The NCBC director is the intelligence community's manager for WMD, responsible for advising the DNI on WMD issues, and overseeing requirements and coordinating collection and analysis on WMD-related intelligence from different elements of the intelligence community.

NCBC's organization includes four directorates: the Directorate of Resource Management and Investment, the Directorate of Intelligence Integration, the Directorate of Interdiction and Counterproliferation Facilitation, and the Directorate of Advanced Concepts and Tradecraft. Together, these directorates focus on five mission areas (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. NCBC Mission Areas



Source: CRS graphic based on 50 U.S.C. §3057.

WMD Counterproliferation Support

The initial focus of the Center was the threat of the use of WMD by foreign terrorists or government adversaries. The Center is the primary organization in the United States to manage the integration of intelligence on the proliferation of WMD, their delivery systems, technology and materials. The Center's statutory responsibilities include

- ensuring full access to intelligence supporting counterproliferation programs, and disseminating timely intelligence on proliferation threats to the President, Congress, and appropriate departments and agencies;

- maintaining a central repository of intelligence on proliferation threats;
- conducting net assessments and warnings of proliferation threats;
- coordinating counterproliferation plans and activities of various U.S. departments and agencies; and
- conducting strategic operational counterproliferation planning.

For much of its existence, the Center's focus has also been on the potential for Al Qaeda, or other foreign terrorists to acquire and deploy chemical or biological weapons. The intelligence community also has devoted attention to Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea's WMD technology and proliferation activities. Some observers have suggested that the overwhelming superiority of U.S. conventional forces could provide greater incentive for otherwise outmatched foreign adversaries to use WMD, underscoring the importance of the Center's capabilities to provide detection and early warning of proliferation developments.

Evolution of NCBC's Biosecurity Mission

The Director of National Intelligence's annual Worldwide Threat Assessments briefed to Congress have regularly included a general warning underscoring the potentially devastating human and economic costs posed by the threat of a pandemic or global health emergency. With the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-22 §402, enacted June 24, 2019), the intelligence community became integrated with the government-wide Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise (PHEMCE) network. The purpose of this network is to enable the U.S. government to more effectively monitor and respond to a global health emergency. Despite this legislation, the COVID-19 pandemic generated congressional concern as to whether the intelligence community gave adequate priority and was sufficiently resourced to address intelligence requirements related to a similar public health emergency. A 2021 House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) study concluded that the intelligence community could be better postured to collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence that provided warning of foreign biological threats. Addressing the same concern in an address to intelligence professionals at the Office of the DNI, July 27, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden remarked, "You're going to have to increase your ranks with people with significant scientific capacity relative to pathogens." Congress acted to strengthen the authorities of the Center to more effectively respond to similar public health threats in the future. The FY2022 IAA (P.L. 117-103) gives NCBC responsibility for managing intelligence on biosecurity threats, including,

- ensuring that elements of the intelligence community provide timely and effective warning to the President and DNI on emerging foreign biological threats, including diseases with the potential to develop into pandemics;
- overseeing and coordinating the collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence on biosecurity and foreign biological threats in support of the intelligence requirements of the Federal departments and agencies responsible for public health;

- promoting information sharing on intelligence and information related to foreign biological threats; and
- identifying gaps in the capabilities of the intelligence community to collect on biosecurity and foreign biological threats.

Other elements of the intelligence community, such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Security Agency (NSA), and Defense Intelligence Agency through its National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI), have the capability to support NCBC's mission with the collection of foreign intelligence on biosecurity threats.

Potential Questions for Congress

Congress may consider the following lines of inquiry as it conducts oversight of NCBC activities.

- What is NCBC's strategy for recruiting and retaining analysts with the requisite expertise to support its expanded biosecurity mission?
- In what ways has NCBC been able to expand its collaboration with public health professionals in the private sector and other agencies of the government to support its biosecurity mission?
- In what ways has NCBC promoted the sharing of releasable information on biosecurity issues with its partners in the government and private sector?

Related CRS Products

CRS In Focus IF11537, *Intelligence Community Support to Pandemic Preparedness and Response*, by Michael E. DeVine

CRS In Focus IF10525, *Defense Primer: National and Defense Intelligence*, by Michael E. DeVine

Relevant Legislation

50 U.S.C. §3057, *National Counterproliferation and Biosecurity Center*

50 U.S.C. §3024, *Responsibilities and Authorities of the Director of National Intelligence*

50 U.S.C. §3025, *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*

42 U.S.C. §300hh, *Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise*

Other Resources

E.O. 12333, *United States Intelligence Activities*

Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-39, *U.S. Policy on Counterterrorism*, June 21, 1995 (declassified)

Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (the "9/11 Commission Report"), 2004

Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States*, March 31, 2005.

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