

NSCEB Response to NATO's Biotechnology and Human Enhancement Technologies Strategy

April 22, 2024

On April 12, 2024, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) publicly released its Biotechnology and Human Enhancement Technologies Strategy.ⁱ The Strategy outlines the opportunities and desired outcomes of these technologies and underscores the geopolitical context surrounding biotechnology and human enhancement technologies (referred to as 'biotechnologies').ⁱⁱ

The National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology ('the Commission') believes the Strategy openly addresses many important aspects of these technologies, including security and responsible use. In particular:

- The Commission agrees with NATO's assessment that there is a vast range of potential benefits of biotechnologies for defense and security purposes. These applications include, but are not limited to, innovative materials for defense purposes, enhanced threat monitoring, and improved supply chain resiliency.
- The Commission believes that the strategic context outlined by NATO creates an imperative for timely and thoughtful consideration of the benefits and risks of biotechnologies. If the United States, alongside NATO countries, is not proactive in assessing and investing in biotechnologies, we will miss the opportunity to set the global norms through building and maintaining a technological advantage.
- The Commission agrees that NATO members choosing to invest and collaborate in biotechnologies innovation present a vital exemplary model for multilateral collaboration. NATO can continue to serve as an important forum to advance innovation and promote constructive dialogue among a range of stakeholders regarding development and use of these emerging technologies. NATO members have a shared interest in preventing, detecting, and mitigating potential state and non-state misuse, and robust multilateral collaboration will make their efforts more effective.
- The strategy commits NATO to ensuring that biotechnology development and use is founded on NATO's norms and values, while reflecting a commitment to adhere to international law. The Commission looks forward to seeing how NATO develops and uses biotechnologies in accordance with these values.
- The Commission concurs with the principles of safety and security and informed consent before using biotechnologies. The Commission recognizes that in some cases, NATO members may ultimately choose not to use biotechnologies.
- The Commission agrees with NATO on the need to protect biotechnologies and relevant biological data from access and exploitation by adversaries or malicious actors.
- The Commission believes that NATO's efforts towards comprehensive risk and impact assessment toolkits along with education initiatives will serve as critical components for future decision-making infrastructure.

The Commission urges NATO and its members to share information and lessons learned about risks and benefits of biotechnologies as members continue to innovate these technologies. As biotechnologies will be applicable in civilian as well as military contexts, the Commission encourages NATO members to consider the broader contexts of these technologies for both military and civil use.

The Commission commends NATO's leadership in reaffirming the need for dialogue on the responsible use of biotechnologies to allow for continued innovation to make the potential benefits of these emerging technologies a reality. The Commission looks forward to substantively engaging further with NATO, along with other international allies and partners, in addressing these important issues.

ⁱ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_224669.htm

ⁱⁱ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_222980.htm