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### Facing a Modern International Issue: The Politics of Biological Warfare in the United States and Korea

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# Facing a Modern International Issue: The Politics of Biological Warfare in the United States and Korea



## Background

According to Oxford, biological warfare is “the use of toxins of biological origin or microorganisms as weapons of war.” Its use contributed to undesirable consequences, but became widespread because of international conflicts. As the international community eventually recognized that biological warfare should cease, efforts such as the Biological Weapons Convention was introduced and established. However, despite international efforts, recent advancements in science and technology have allowed biological warfare to resurface as a threat to global security and welfare.

## Key Terms

- Biological warfare: the use of toxins of biological origin or microorganisms as weapons of war
- Biological Weapons Convention: Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, an international treaty that bans the usage of biological warfare and prohibits its development, production, acquisition, or transfer.
- Geneva Protocol: The Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare of 1925, a treaty prohibiting the use of both chemical and biological weapons in international conflicts.
- Korean War: war fought between North Korean and South Korea from 1950 to 1953. The war began on June 25, 1950 when South Korea was invaded by North Korea along the border.

## Methods

Examining and analyzing relevant sources:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Letters during the Korean War
- Letters exchanged during former President Richard Nixon’s presidency
- Documents of the experiences of prisoners or former users of biological warfare

## Results

According to sources, during the origins of biological warfare, its central use were for weapons of war. However, due to its extensive history, biological warfare adapted and expanded to be utilized for other political aims, such as assassinations. Additionally, in alignment to its extensive history, countries have eventually strived to prevent and ban the development and usage of biological warfare, most notably through the international efforts of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Geneva Protocol. However, despite these international efforts, countries have conducted violations of these international compromises or agreements countless times, as they were not enforced effectively. This was especially the case after the establishment of the Geneva Protocol, as the creation of a complete ban was not achieved. Wars, including World War II, followed the efforts of the Geneva Protocol and it was at that point when the United Nations called for the elimination of biological warfare. Moreover, the role of biological warfare was that it has affected the individual politics of countries as well, most especially diplomacy. Countries, especially the United States, became vulnerable to the allegations of other countries, harming their relationships not just with the countries that have accused them, but possibly other countries as well. This was the case for the United States during the Korean War, which the Soviet Union was convinced that accusing the United States of using biological warfare would cause countries to come together and hate the United States for the same reason they did and eventually possibly win the Korean War. However, this wasn’t the case, as the Soviet Union was motivated by communism. Furthermore, as aforementioned, biological warfare has adapted relative to its time period. As a result, the politics of biological warfare should be ensured and reflected upon at times, which is what the United States did during the Richard Nixon administration. However, this was only due to the public’s rising opinion on the dangers and harms of biological warfare, which prompted the government to work on their programs and policies regarding biological warfare. The United States should strive to reflect and change their policies to modern times, as the United States should be aware of how biological warfare can resurface from bio-technological advancements and the increase of armed conflicts, such as the recent Russia-Ukraine War. Through this war, the United States was accused once again for using biological warfare to aid Ukraine by none other than Russia. As false allegations were punished in the past, it shows that the politics of the United States regarding biological warfare has been ineffective in the modern world as they couldn’t prevent the allegations from occurring. In other words, biological warfare is still a modern issue and the historization and politics of it in both the United States and Korea evidently shows that the issue needs to be perceived as a major international issue.

## Research Questions

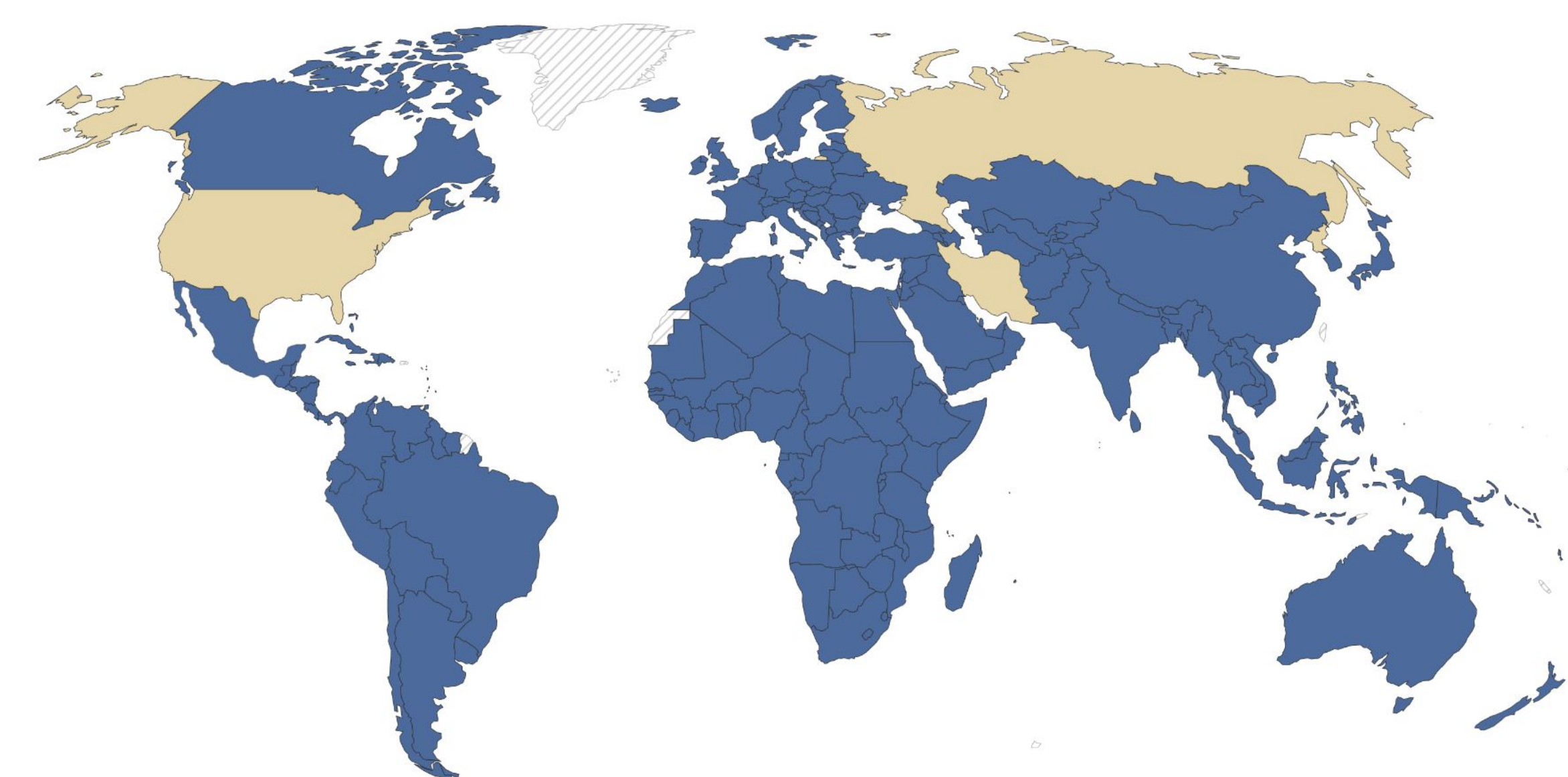
- How has biological warfare changed historically?
- What is the role of the Geneva Protocol and the Biological Weapons Convention?
- What are the policies of biological warfare in the United States and Korea?
- How has biological warfare affected the politics of the United States and Korea?
- What are the potential consequences of biological warfare?
- Is biological warfare still a modern issue?

## Conclusion

In conclusion, biological warfare remains as a modern issue as a result of biotechnological advancements and new international conflicts. As the world understands the risks of biological warfare in the modern world through its historization and analysis, policymakers in countries, especially the United States and Korea, should strive to reflect on modern policies as a foundation for establishing necessary political changes.

Current biological weapons activity, 2022

Biological weapons are organisms or toxins used to cause death or harm through their poisonous properties.

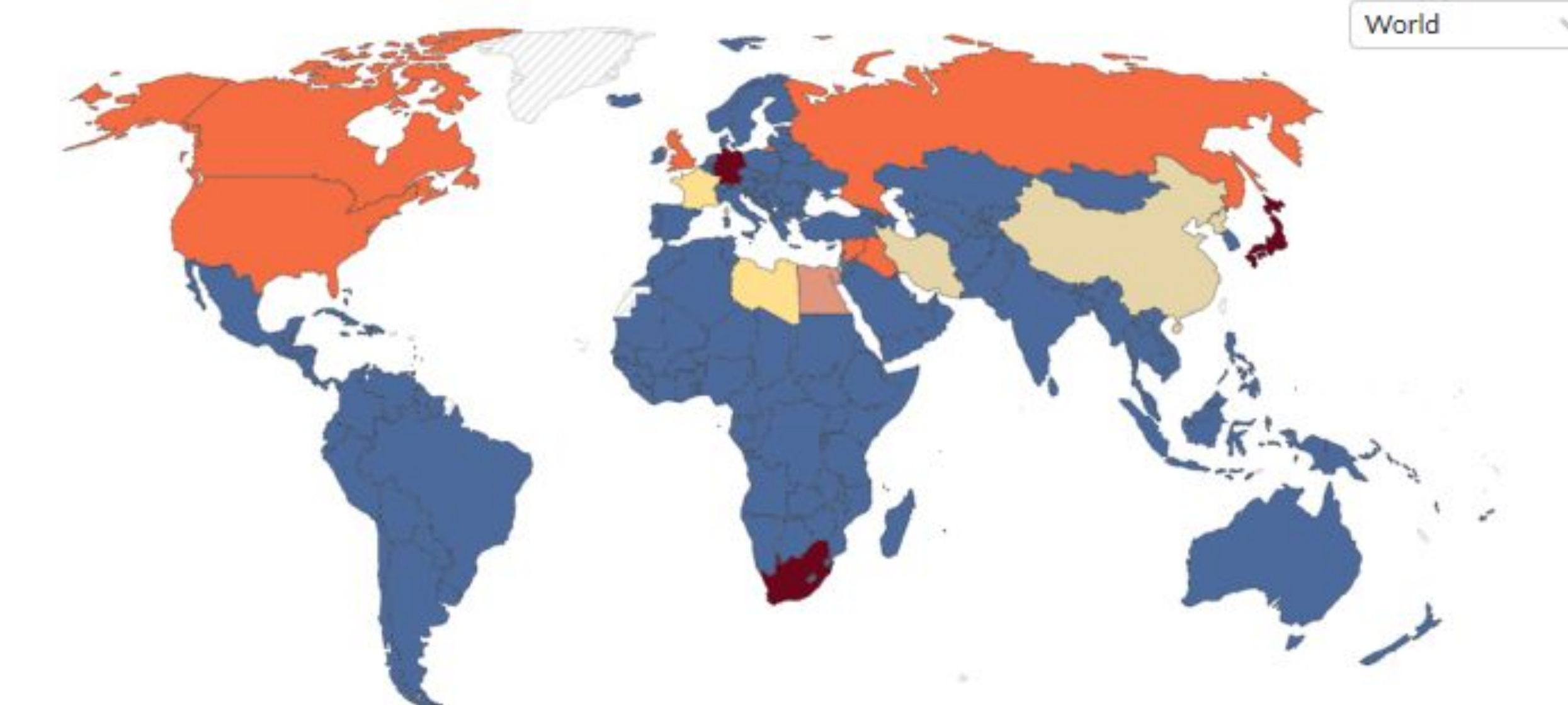


No data | neither pursues nor possesses | allegedly pursues

Source: OWID based on ACA (2022), NTI (2022), and CNS (2008). OurWorldInData.org/biological-and-chemical-weapons • CC BY  
Note: Information as of September 15, 2022. 'Allegedly' refers to situations where a country was charged by another country of pursuing biological weapons, but the claims have not been confirmed by the country itself or impartial observers.

Historical biological weapons activity

Biological weapons are organisms or toxins used to cause death or harm through their poisonous properties. The closest a country came to using biological weapons ever is recorded.



No data | neither pursued nor possessed | allegedly pursued | pursued | allegedly possessed | possessed | used

Source: OWID based on ACA (2022), NTI (2022), and CNS (2008). OurWorldInData.org/biological-and-chemical-weapons • CC BY  
Note: 'Allegedly' refers to situations where a country was charged by another country of pursuing or possessing biological weapons, but the claims have not been confirmed by the country itself or impartial observers.

The top left graph portrays biological weapons activities in the year of 2022, while the right graph portrays the closest historical usage of biological weapons activities in the world.



The Conference on the Committee on Disarmament at Geneva in 1969