
Defense Report

AUSA



Chemical Warfare—It Can't Be Legislated Away

Most members of Congress work hard. On a busy day they shuttle between committee and subcommittee meetings for roll calls on the floor of the House or Senate and in between those periods they try to deal with visiting constituents, lobbyists and the press. It is all the more puzzling, then, when the hard-pressed legislators expend valuable time on projects that will go nowhere.

Most recently 20 members of the House have co-sponsored House Concurrent Resolution 250, "To Reduce the Threat of Chemical Warfare," a goal that is highly desired, especially among the military men and women who have the most personal and immediate stake in the proposition.

The resolution, if approved by both houses of Congress, would reaffirm the US commitment to various existing protocols on the subject and encourage continued efforts to secure an effective treaty against further development, production or stockpiling. These are generalities that no one could take issue with.

But the resolution goes further. It would direct a unilateral ban (lasting three years) on US manufacture of lethal or incapacitating agents, including the new binary nerve gas munitions. As ". . . a sign of good faith," the resolution would direct the President to to destroy 3,000 tons of lethal mustard agents in the US stockpile over the next three years and to invite "interested international organizations" to witness the destruction.

Having taken this step, the Resolution would direct the President to "invite" the Soviet Union to show its sincerity by following the example of the United States.

All of this may make wonderful sense in the practical vacuum of the House Cloak Room but it flies in the face of at least two hard realities:

—First; the Soviet Union is already a signatory to the same anti-chemical warfare protocols approved by the United States but this has not deterred them from making the use of chemical weapons a routine part of their attack doctrine. There is little doubt that the Soviets will use chemical weapons whenever they can help achieve an advantage.

--Second; the resolution makes a plea for "independent, international procedures for verifying the disposal of stocks and facilities," apparently forgetting that the Soviet Union has refused inspection of nuclear arms for many years.

The twenty well-intentioned members will be able to send copies of their resolution to interested friends and to point with pride to their efforts. The consensus on Capital Hill is that the resolution will die in the Bill Clerk's hopper.