
Defense Report

AUSA



Chemical Weapons—A “Freeze” That Failed

The recent House of Representatives debate on the fiscal 1984 Defense Authorization Bill has again demonstrated our refusal to face squarely repugnant issues like chemical warfare, although it has become manifestly apparent that our unilateral 15-year freeze on the production of chemical weapons has failed totally to elicit similar action on the part of the Soviet Union.

On the contrary, not only is there no question that the USSR is continuing to develop and produce chemical munitions, but the well-documented use of “yellow rain” toxin and other chemicals in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia by the Soviets and their proxies demonstrates that they are willing to deploy and employ those which they develop and produce—*at least against those who lack the means to respond in kind.*

It is to deter this potential use of chemical weapons against our forces that the Administration has repeatedly sought authority to produce limited quantities of the so-called binary munitions, consisting of two nonlethal chemicals in separate containers which become lethal only when mixed after the munition is fired at an enemy. Unlike the weapons in the existing stockpile, they present no deadly hazard while in storage and their shelf life is very long.

Once again, opponents advanced the same naive arguments heard before. Perhaps the most pernicious is the claim that the U.S. chemical stockpile is already so large that we need manufacture no more. In fact, the corrosive agents in stockpile present problems in both safety and reliability which steadily increases with age. Less than half are contained in munitions deliverable by existing weapon systems; the other half is unusable and only represents a disposal problem.

History clearly reveals that only certain knowledge of rapid and effective retaliation in kind has effectively deterred first use of chemical weapons. Our obsolete, decaying stockpile hardly confronts the USSR with that “certain knowledge” today. It invites rather than prevents a kind of warfare totally repugnant to all in the civilized world. That condition must be corrected.