
Defense Report

AUSA



A Chemical Warfare Deterrent—We're Not There Yet

By approving the \$187.5 billion Defense Authorization Bill for fiscal 1984, the Congress has given tacit approval to the Administration's plan to avert chemical warfare through modernization of our decaying stockpile of chemical munitions. This is not to say that the establishment of a credible chemical warfare deterrent is now a fait accompli. Congressional opponents of chemical weapons have vowed to continue the challenge through the Appropriations process and, until that process is completed, not one cent can be used for the production of chemical munitions.

The Authorization Bill allows \$114.6 million for limited production and storage of binary chemical munitions (consisting of two chemicals which are mixed and become lethal only after being fired at an enemy). The authority carries with it stipulations that there be no final assembly of binary weapons until late 1985 and that an existing shell be destroyed for each new one produced.

Chemical warfare is understandably abhorrent and historically has erupted only against weak and unprotected forces who cannot retaliate in kind. There is compelling evidence that the Soviets, or their agents, are gassing people in Afghanistan and in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the employment of chemical agents is integral to Soviet tactical doctrine. And any attack on NATO forces could see them unleash their lethal arsenal, given the current status of Western ability to respond.

During World War II and following, the U.S. was able to prevent chemical attack by being prepared to respond in kind. This is no longer the case. We unilaterally halted production of chemical weapons fourteen years ago. This one-sided freeze has been a miserable failure and was countered by an unprecedented buildup of Soviet chemical warfare forces. We have since lost our deterrent or retaliatory capabilities as our aging stocks of chemical munitions have deteriorated. Our national security has been dangerously weakened by this serious asymmetry between U.S. and Soviet forces.

In the up-coming Appropriations Bill the Congress can move to restore our power to deter chemical aggression by proceeding with the modernization of our chemical warfare deterrent. The sure knowledge of our ability to respond to an enemy chemical assault could even provide the incentive for negotiating a verifiable ban on chemical weapons. To deny our soldiers the means to deter chemical war is at the same time immoral and inhumane.

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