
Defense Report

AUSA



Soviet Chemical Warfare—A Threat We Cannot Meet

Since 1969, when the United States imposed a moratorium on the production of chemical weapons, this nation's intelligence-gathering agencies, while dutiful, have not focused on the growing chemical warfare threat. Consequently, our knowledge of the Soviet Union's capabilities for the use of chemicals is woefully inadequate. But we do know enough to identify a significant threat and to believe that the Soviet armed forces are equipped, trained and ready to employ chemicals in support of their operations. We also know that U.S. forces, and those of our NATO allies, are neither equipped, trained nor capable of functioning adequately in a chemical environment.

For some years now the Army has budgeted for the production of binary chemical munitions. We have come to recognize that this modern retaliatory delivery capability can deter enemy use or prevent the asymmetry which develops immediately on the battlefield if one side can employ an overwhelming chemical advantage.

For a host of reasons, including the safety of munitions handlers and friendly populations, binary chemical weapons are essential elements of this retaliatory requirement.

Similarly, the more we learn about the Soviet arsenal of chemical agents, which can attack the respiratory, blood or central nervous systems of our soldiers, the more we are convinced that our defensive means are far from satisfactory. Our detection and warning systems are unreliable, individual protective equipment is cumbersome and only temporarily effective, and collective protection is almost nonexistent. Of major concern also is the paucity of means to cope medically with the mass of casualties which can be expected from an enemy surprise use of chemicals.

We need an immediate, comprehensive and effective research, development and production effort to correct these shortcomings. The moral high ground of the American moratorium won't protect soldiers on the battlefield or civilians in the theater of war, and it will not negate the conclusive advantages an enemy would have if he launched a lightning campaign of conquest, employing chemicals to support his operations.