
Defense Report

AUSA



In the Likely Event of Chemical War, The United States is Not Prepared

A long-standing national security objective of the United States is to eliminate the use of chemical weapons in war. U.S. policies to achieve this objective have two major aspects. The first deals with chemical weapons arms control; the second, with military capabilities to deter chemical warfare.

Unfortunately, an acceptable agreement on chemical disarmament is not readily available, due primarily to the intransigence of the Soviet Union on verification.

On the military front, the U.S. position for years has been that chemical weapons should be maintained as a deterrent to chemical war (through the threatened sanction of retaliation in kind).

However, the U.S. retaliatory stockpile has become increasingly unusable and obsolete in the 16 years since we last produced chemical munitions. Further, there is ample evidence of an extensive and continuing buildup in chemical warfare capabilities by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies.

In response to these negative trends, the Reagan Administration has repeatedly sought limited funding to improve the U.S. deterrent retaliatory posture. In virtually every instance, the requested funds have been denied by Congress, more often than not on the premise that the U.S. chemical stocks are sufficient to meet our military requirements.

But that argument simply won't wash. The Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff have all testified before Congress about the dangerously deteriorating condition of the chemical munitions upon which we must rely to deter potential aggressors from initiating chemical war against the U.S. or our allies.

We cannot keep our heads in the sand any longer. While we have occupied the "moral high ground" of a unilateral freeze on the production of chemical munitions, our most likely adversary has developed such a lopsided chemical war capacity that he would be foolish if he did not exploit his obvious military advantage. Unless we take action now to reconstitute a believable chemical retaliatory capability we are encouraging the use of those weapons against us.