
Defense Report

AUSA



To Delay Preparation for Chemical War is to Invite Attack

After many years of intense, emotional debate, Congress gave approval in the 1986 Department of Defense Authorization Act for the production of new, safer-to-handle binary chemical munitions. Binary weapons are made of two relatively harmless chemicals that become deadly only when they are mixed.

Despite unimpeachable evidence that the Soviet Union has large stocks of chemical weapons in the hands of the world's largest chemical warfare force, there are some members of Congress who have stated their intention to fight the Administration's effort to modernize our own chemical retaliatory deterrent. Their principal argument is that the United States already possesses the capability to deter first use of these weapons against our service men and women. This just isn't so.

Just last year, the Presidential Chemical Warfare Review Commission concluded that modernization of our chemical weapons is badly needed because the bulk of our existing stocks are of little military value and even the small portion (about 10 percent) that might be considered useful is extremely hazardous to handle. The Commission further concluded that the current stocks should be replaced and destroyed at an accelerated rate.

The Defense Department's program for the modernization of our chemical retaliatory capability provides for the complete destruction of stocks presently on hand and their replacement with a stockpile of the safer binary munitions that will be only one-fifth the size.

The principal objective of the U.S. chemical program remains the prevention of chemical war. A credible retaliatory capability is the key element in deterring the use of chemical weapons by our potential adversaries. Our current stockpile is not adequate to serve that role.

The courageous action by Congress to provide funds to begin the production of the 155-mm binary projectile was the first step toward acquiring the credible capability we need. If we are to deter the use of chemical weapons against our troops, it is absolutely essential that Congress reject the efforts by a vocal minority to deny our soldiers the single, most effective deterrent available to them.