
Defense Report

AUSA



The Threat of Chemical Warfare — Are We Prepared to Face Reality?

No one detests wars any more than the soldiers who must fight them. But there is one form of warfare — the use of chemical weapons — that occupies a special position of abhorrence. A soldier is no less a casualty when attacked with chemicals than he is when hit by machine-gun fire. It is the insidiousness of chemicals that mark them for special dislike and generate the fully justifiable effort to have them banned from the battlefield.

As evidence of the extent of our commitment to that anti-chemical warfare policy, the United States, in 1969, unilaterally halted the production and manufacture of all chemical weapons.

Today the armed forces of the United States face almost unprepared a vast and potent chemical warfare threat and little is being done to repair that situation. In the words of Adm. William J. Crowe, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "we have no deterrent to chemical warfare in NATO or elsewhere."

For years the Defense Department has recommended to Congress a program for providing our soldiers the protection of a credible chemical warfare deterrent — some means to let our potential foes know that the use of chemical weapons against our forces will be met with swift and effective retaliation in kind. It is somewhat gratifying to note the resurgence of concern that has resulted in Congressional approval of the production of some new chemical munitions. But the small and hesitating step is only the first such needed to carry us to a position of chemical sufficiency — one which guarantees prompt and adequate battlefield competence if deterrence fails.

The time has long since passed for this nation to stand blindly on the high moral plane it reached with its unilateral renunciation of chemical munitions production. Our forces around the world are in danger of chemical attack and they are dangerously incapable of deterring or countering such an attack. We urgently need a national awareness of the chemical war threat and a military program to re-establish American chemical warfare credibility in order to overcome that lack of preparedness.