

ARMS CONTROL DIGEST



Paris Conference on Chemical Weapons

■ An international conference on the prohibition of chemical weapons (CW), attended by delegates from 149 countries including eighty foreign ministers, met in Paris from 7 to 11 January. The purpose of the conference, proposed by President Reagan last September, was to reaffirm support for the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of CW, and to add impetus to the effort at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva to negotiate a global ban on the production and stockpiling of such weapons.

The conference met amidst high tension over US charges that Libya had built a huge chemical weapons plant at Rabta, southwest of Tripoli. The meeting itself was a rocky one. Iran and Iraq accused each other of violating the Geneva Protocol; many delegates boycotted speeches by the Israeli and South African foreign ministers; various Arab states, citing Israel's reported possession of nuclear weapons, insisted on linking progress in CW control to nuclear disarmament; and India and other Third World states argued against controls on the export of materials used in CW, on the grounds that they would hinder the development of peaceful chemical industries and discriminate in favour of states already possessing CW.

Of perhaps greatest interest, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze acknowledged on 8 January that his country had been "late" in stopping its production of CW and "taking other repressive measures against them." However, he declared that the USSR would soon complete an installation for the destruction of CW and immediately begin destroying its old stocks without waiting for a

new CW convention. American and other Western officials and observers welcomed the announcement, but noted that the installation in question was a small one which would take a great many years to make a dent in the enormous Soviet CW stockpile. They also pointed out that the US had been destroying its obsolete stocks for some years, although it began in December 1987 to produce an entirely new generation of such weapons.

In his speech, Shevardnadze also pledged his country's support for investigations by the UN Secretary-General of the alleged use of CW, "no matter where," with "no one ... hav[ing] the right to refuse the holding of such investigations on his territory."

In a speech the same day, Canada's Joe Clark stated that Canada had "already advised other nations of the destruction" of its own CW stockpiles dating from the Second World War; that it did not intend ever to initiate the use of CW, even against non-Parties to the Geneva Protocol; and would not "develop, produce, acquire or stockpile such weapons, unless these weapons are used against the military forces or the civil population of Canada or its allies." As for biological and toxin weapons, Canada had never possessed them and "does not intend to develop, produce, acquire, stockpile or use such weapons at any time in the future."

A number of other positive developments took place during the conference. Ten countries – including North and South Korea, Laos, and Bangladesh – announced that they would sign the Geneva Protocol. Iraq repeated a pledge to abide by the Protocol in the future (while admitting to having used CW in its war with Iran, Iraq maintains that Iran had used them first). It also promised that it would not make its new-found CW expertise available to other states. For its part, Iran said that it

would sign a global CW ban regardless of whether Iraq did so or not.

In the end, the conference adopted by consensus a six-point "Final Declaration" pledging not to use CW and to condemn its use by others; calling for additional states to join the Geneva Protocol; stressing the need to conclude a global ban on production and stockpiling "at the earliest date"; and supporting a UN role in ensuring compliance with CW controls, including investigations by the Secretary-General of alleged violations of the 1925 Protocol.

After the conference had ended, chief US delegate, Ambassador William Burns, declared that it had "forged a powerful global consensus" and "given significant political impetus" to the CD negotiations. He conceded that Washington would have preferred an explicit endorsement of new export controls and the use of sanctions against CW users. Joe Clark described the final declaration as "a major step on the road to banning these weapons," noting that "the international community, as never before, [had] resoundingly endorsed the objective of a total chemical weapons ban." Nevertheless, many outside observers were skeptical of the claims, criticizing the conference for having failed to condemn recent CW users by name (particularly Iraq). Some also feared that the meeting may have been counterproductive, by demonstrating the political value of having or threatening to acquire CW (as reflected in Third World demands for a linkage between chemical and nuclear disarmament).

Conventional Arms Control in Europe

■ In a speech to the UN on 7 December, Soviet President Gorbachev announced that the USSR would take a number of unilateral steps, including:

■ reducing its total armed forces by 500,000 men, including "sub-

stantial cuts ... in conventional armaments," over the next two years;

■ withdrawing 50,000 men and 5,000 tanks, including six tank divisions and "landing-assault" and "landing-crossing" units, from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, also by 1991. Remaining Soviet divisions in these countries would be "restructured" and "become strictly defensive";

■ reducing additional troops and armaments in the European part of the USSR, making total reductions within Europe of 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems, and 800 combat aircraft;

■ making "considerable reductions" in forces stationed in Soviet Asia; and

■ withdrawing a "large number" of Soviet troops from Mongolia.

By Western estimates, the reductions would amount to about ten percent of total Soviet military manpower; more than a quarter of its tanks in Europe, including about half of those in Eastern Europe; a quarter of its European-based artillery; and ten to thirteen percent of its European-based combat aircraft.

US Secretary of State Shultz welcomed the announced reductions as a "significant step in the right direction." However, he cautioned that even after they were completed in 1991, there still would be a "major asymmetry in important categories of force structure for the Soviet Union." Other Western officials noted the possibility that the cuts could come primarily in support troops (the Soviet armed forces include about 1.5 million men engaged in railroad work, construction, civil defence, and so on), and in older tanks and artillery pieces. This was denied by Maj. Gen. Yuri Lebedev of the Soviet General Staff during a press conference in Moscow on 22 December. He said that the tank divisions would be removed with all of their modern