

chemical weapons potential, as desired by the administration but rejected by Congress in 1982, 1983 and 1984, could have negative effects on the Geneva negotiations.

Context of treaty

Here are some ideas that have emerged at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament concerning the content and structure of a convention banning chemical weapons. In order to preclude completely the possibility of toxic chemicals being used as weapons, the scope of prohibitions for a future chemical weapons convention is relatively comprehensive. The draft convention requires contracting parties not to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain or transfer chemical weapons. There is basic agreement on the definition of a chemical weapon. Chemical weapons include super-toxic lethal, other lethal or harmful chemicals, as well as munitions and means of delivery.

The main sign of positive action demanded by the convention is the elimination, as soon as possible, of all chemical weapons and all production facilities. All contracting parties are first obligated to declare existing chemical weapons stocks and production facilities. Destruction itself should be complete within ten years.

The provisions governing verification which are planned for inclusion in the future chemical weapons treaty cover the systematic inspection of the destruction of current chemical weapons stocks; the elimination of production facilities for chemical weapons; the very small-scale production of chemical agents of war in a production facility permitted to operate for "protective purposes" (e.g., in the context of defensive measures). In addition to systematic verification, a safety net is provided in the form of checking suspicious cases, for example, when a contracting party is suspected of contravening the obligations arising from the convention by secretly developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, retaining, transferring or using chemical weapons. International on-site inspections are planned for both types of verification—systematic verification and "on-challenge" verification.

Problems of verification

In working out an adequate verification system, which is indeed the most crucial problem facing the negotiators in Geneva, the Conference on Disarmament is breaking new ground. To date, none of the existing arms control instruments has contained a verification mechanism for checking compliance with a convention banning an entire category of weapons. The attempts at verification which play a role in strategic arms control provide no model here since the "national technical means" spoken of in the SALT agreement are not an adequate means of surveillance for purposes of checking compliance with a chemical weapons convention. Unlike rockets, whose deployment is largely visible using satellite reconnaissance, a chemical weapons arsenal can be maintained or built up over a long period without being detected. Chemical weapons are indistinguishable from conventional weapons—the same canister grenade can be filled with explosive or with nerve gas—and it is not immediately obvious whether a production

facility is being used to make chemical weapons or pesticides, pharmaceuticals or paints.

The possibilities for circumventing the terms of a chemical weapons convention—simply by camouflaging chemical weapons—and the special dangers posed by these insidious, cruel weapons, necessitate a system of verification which is to date unprecedented in arms control agreements because it forces the contracting parties to tolerate far-reaching on-site inspections, including inspections of sensitive military and industrial sites. This implies a difficult tightrope walk for all the various parties—a tightrope walk between interest in banning chemical weapons and the need to protect against inappropriately intrusive verification measures which touch on questions of military security and protection against industrial espionage.

Against the background of this kind of complex basic conflict, the tenacious objectivity of the delegations to the Geneva Conference on Disarmament is a surprising but at the same time encouraging sign as they continue their efforts to develop adequate verification mechanisms both for systematic inspections and also for on-challenge verification.

The process of deciding these matters reveals differing conceptual viewpoints which, the one hand, concern the voluntary or mandatory nature of international inspections and, on the other hand, concern the question whether international inspections have priority over national inspections or vice versa. The USA believes that there should be rigorous mandatory international verification, as described in particular by US Vice-President George Bush on April 18, 1983, before the Geneva Conference on Disarmament as a new philosophy of verification, the so-called "open invitation." In contrast, the Soviets feel that the inspection of suspect cases especially should be totally voluntary. Whereas Western nations and Third World countries, including China, give international monitoring priority over domestic monitoring, socialist states have put the emphasis squarely on the measures for domestic implementation of the chemical weapons convention.

Verification of destruction of weapons

In the question of the destruction of chemical arsenals and the verification of such destruction, the Conference on Disarmament has achieved astonishing success, so that this realm seems to have been fundamentally resolved. All the negotiating parties at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament believe that the elimination of stocks of chemical weapons should be subject to systematic international inspection, as performed both by constant monitoring with instruments and by constant systematic international on-site inspections. The Soviet delegation agreed in February 1984 to the principle of inspectors being present continually during the phase of the destruction of chemical arsenals. In so doing, the Soviet delegation abandoned the "agreed quota" proposal which it had previously advocated and which would have had only periodic on-site inspections, with the frequency of such inspections determined by the quantity of the chemical weapons to be destroyed, their toxicity and their degree of hazard, as well as by the technological parameters of the destruction facility.