

COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States Programme to Deter Chemical Warfare

Background

The ultimate goal of the United States in the area of chemical warfare (CW) is a complete and verifiable ban on the development, production, and stockpiling of chemical weapons. Until such a ban can be obtained, our objective, consistent with existing treaties and international law, is to deter the use of chemical weapons. The United States will not use chemical weapons unless chemical weapons are first used against us or our allies. The United States does not and will not possess biological or toxin weapons.

Soviet Chemical and Biological Warfare Programmes

Soviet military doctrine envisages the use of chemical weapons and acknowledges their value, particularly when used in massive quantities and in surprise attacks.

Of more significance, the Soviet Union and its allies are well prepared to wage chemical warfare and to fight in a chemically contaminated environment. The USSR possesses a wide variety of lethal and incapacitating chemical agents and the means to deliver them. They have a busy and expanding chemical proving ground and a large, well-trained chemical organization, with over 60,000 troops, whose status within the Soviet military hierarchy was enhanced during the 1970s. They have invested heavily in individual and collective protection and decontamination equipment, and they train with actual chemical agents.

In addition to extensive Soviet chemical warfare programmes, a major accident in Sverdlovsk and evidence in Southeast Asia indicate that the Soviet Union's arsenal also includes toxic substances specifically prohibited by the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

United States Programme in the 1970s

In contrast with the Soviet Union during most of the 1970s, the United States allowed its retaliatory capability to decline, did little to improve defense against chemicals and neglected relevant defense doctrine and training. In addition, the United States in 1962 stopped the production of lethal or incapacitating chemical agents and the filling of new munitions with chemical agents. At the same time, the United States renounced the use of biological and toxin weapons, destroyed all stocks of these weapons and converted its biological warfare facilities to peaceful purposes.

Arms Control Efforts

While unilaterally restraining our capabilities, the United States made major efforts, in the late 1970s, to eliminate the chemical warfare threat by attempting to reach agreement with the Soviet Union on a comprehensive and verifiable ban on chemical weapons. Verification of such a ban is a complex and difficult problem.