

4/3/97 Number 473

THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION: MAKING AMERICA LESS SECURE

Later this month, the U.S. Senate is likely to vote on ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), a multilateral treaty that would bar the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons by the countries that ratify it. The Clinton Administration has stated that the Senate must ratify the CWC before April 29 because it would enter into force on that date without U.S. participation if approval is delayed. This deadline, however, is artificial, concocted by the Administration to pressure the Senate into approving the treaty hastily and without proper review. In reality, the United States may ratify the CWC at any time after the April 29 deadline. There is no reason to rush this treaty through the Senate just because the Administration desires that the United States be among the original parties to it.

Why so little time for the Senate to debate this very important treaty?

Last September, the Administration requested a delay in Senate consideration of the CWC because it believed the Senate would reject it. There were good reasons that the Senate was prepared to balk then, and these reasons are no less valid today. The CWC will fail to achieve its stated goal of a global ban on chemical weapons. Moreover, it will make the United States more vulnerable to chemical weapon attack.

If ratified, the Chemical Weapons Convention would:

- **Increase the risk that chemical weapons would be used.** By undermining the U.S. chemical deterrent, the CWC might well increase the likelihood that chemical weapons would be used. The experience of World War II shows that an aggressor possessing chemical weapons will hesitate to use them to attack a country that also possesses such weapons. If the United States bans all of its chemical weapons as required by the CWC, outlaw states that retain them will have a military advantage over the United States and other countries that have banned them. This military advantage increases the likelihood that chemical weapons could be used against the United States.
- **Be unverifiable.** Despite elaborate and burdensome verification provisions, compliance with the CWC cannot be verified adequately. At a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then-Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey warned that the “chemical weapons problem is so difficult from an intelligence perspective that I cannot state that we have high confidence in our ability to detect noncompliance, especially on a small scale.”

- **Be unenforceable.** Violations of the CWC are likely to go unpunished. If a violation did occur, the United Nations Security Council would have to impose penalties severe enough to change the behavior of an outlaw state. But the five permanent members of the Security Council can veto any enforcement resolution lodged against them or against their friends. China and Russia, for example, simply can veto resolutions imposing sanctions on them if they disagree with other Security Council members.
- **Increase the risk of proliferation of chemical weapons.** Article XI of the CWC requires cooperation among countries with respect to the peaceful use of chemicals. In many respects, this provision resembles the 1950s Atoms for Peace arrangement to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear power. This is the approach to arms control and trade that has been used to justify Russia's sale of nuclear reactors to Iran. The last thing the world needs is a "Poison for Peace" program that helps spread chemical weapons around the world, as Atoms for Peace did for nuclear reactors to Iran and North Korea.
- **Not enhance U.S. security.** By making arms control an end in itself, the CWC will not protect U.S. national security. Arms control is only one of several ways to achieve the goal of national security. The United States needs the additional tools of deterrence, defenses, and even offensive military operations. It makes no sense for the United States to give up its chemical weapons if other countries still possess them.
- **Be inconsistent with U.S. global responsibilities.** The CWC, by treating all countries alike, fails to acknowledge the special role of the United States in global security. Superpower status imposes important global responsibilities that the United States can fulfill only by maintaining armed forces capable of projecting overwhelming force around the globe. Because the United States has these special responsibilities, it is treated as an exceptional case under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty with regard to its possession of nuclear weapons. The same principle should apply to the U.S. chemical weapons arsenal.

Advising and consenting to the ratification of treaties is one of the Senate's most important constitutional responsibilities—particularly when the treaty under consideration has profound implications for the security of the country. Considering all that is at stake, Senators should scrutinize carefully all of the provisions and implications of the Chemical Weapons Convention before they vote. This will lead to an inescapable conclusion: Ratifying the CWC can only leave the United States less secure.

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