

A Novel Proposal on Chemical Weapons

This "goes beyond anything that we really proposed before," said Vice President George Bush, as he unveiled a draft U.S. treaty to ban the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons. Appearing on 18 April before an international group in Geneva, Bush was referring specifically to unprecedented language in the treaty that would enable either the United States or the Soviet Union to roam on short notice and almost at will through each other's top-secret military facilities.

The provision is clearly the most striking and controversial feature of the 66-page draft. Soviet commentator Vladimir Bogachyov, writing a day later in the Soviet newspaper *Tass*, described it as "obviously unacceptable to the Soviet Union," and went on to assail the Reagan Administration for its "obstructionist approach" to the whole issue. The Arms Control Association, a Washington-based lobbying group, has also attacked the Administration's proposal, and similar though less strident criticism has reportedly come from U.S. allies in Europe.

The provision thus qualifies as an immediate sticking point in the multilateral negotiations now under way (*Science*, 20 April, p. 263). Under a complicated formula, it would enable any of five members on a fact-finding panel, including one each from the Soviet Union and the United States, "to request at any time a special on-site inspection of any other party . . . to clarify and resolve any matter which may cause doubts about compliance or gives rise to concerns about a related matter which may be considered ambiguous," according to the draft. In short, the challenger need not suspect an actual violation; he need only be unconvinced that the other party has complied.

This unequivocal inspection right would apply to any chemical weapons production, storage, or destruction facility, as well as "any other location or facility owned by the government of a party, and . . . locations or facilities controlled by the government of a party." Access to the site must be provided within 48 hours, and there is no appeal. If, on the other hand, the facility is privately owned, and provides no goods or services to the government, the inspection may be refused "for the most exceptional of reasons," and an alternative means of resolving the complaint may be proposed. The complainer would have no recourse except a further protest to the United Nations.

Given that the entire Soviet chemical industry is government-controlled, while the U.S. industry is largely private, the treaty distinction works to U.S. advantage, as officials in Washington readily agree. They claim, however, that the U.S. constitutional prohibition on "unreasonable" searches of private property left them no other choice.

The inclusion of these inspection provisions, apparently at the behest of Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, represents a stiffening of the U.S. position since early 1983. Then, in a similar Geneva address, Vice President Bush said that he favored a requirement that requests for ad hoc on-site inspection be approved by at least four other countries. He also proposed a somewhat more relaxed formulation in which the suspect country would only have "a stringent obligation" to permit the inspection.

The Soviets are likely to reject the new U.S. proposal

because it is broad enough—in theory—to permit almost unfettered U.S. access to Soviet military installations, including the design bureaus of the Strategic Rocket Forces, all nuclear weapons depots, and the Plesetsk weapons testing and production facility. Taken literally, of course, it might also permit Soviet inspection of the Los Alamos, Livermore, and Sandia weapons laboratories; the Savannah River Plant in South Carolina, where plutonium is produced for the military; the Pantex plant in Amarillo, Texas, where nuclear weapons are assembled; possibly the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters compound in Langley, Virginia; and perhaps even the National Security Agency headquarters at Fort Meade, Maryland.

Bush took notice of this dual-edged sword when he told the Geneva meeting that "some governments speak as if openness and effective verification cut against their inter-



Vice President George Bush in Geneva on 18 April.

ests alone. But openness entails burdens for every state, including the United States. Openness of the kinds we are proposing for the chemical weapons ban would come at a price. . . . The United States government is willing to pay." Presumably, requests for frivolous or unnecessarily intrusive inspections will be deterred by the prospect of similar requests from the other side.

This, at least, is the official line. One policy-maker, who asked not to be identified, explained that "it's good negotiating strategy to start tough. We can always step back into a more reasonable position at a later time." Indeed, David Emery, a deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, has already alluded to the prospect of U.S. concessions. Within 2 days of Bush's speech, he noted publicly that "we are not presenting a document that won't be subject to any modification or changes . . . this is not a take-it-or-leave-it treaty."

Thus far, the Administration is resisting pressures to discuss its differences with the Soviet Union in direct formal negotiations, and still prefers the more clamorous forum of the 40-nation Conference on Disarmament. The *Washington Post*, quoting an unnamed government official, reported on 22 April that an Administration request for bilateral talks was forthcoming. This was denied on the following day, however, by officials at the Defense Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Bush, in his Geneva speech, did offer to talk directly with the Soviets on an informal basis.—**R. JEFFREY SMITH**