# Chemical Arms Ban Still Uncertain

*Despite promises made at last week's meeting in Paris, growing Third World interest in chemical weapons suggests that the prospects for a worldwide ban remain cloudy*

*Paris*

LAST WEEK'S MEETING here on chemical weapons amply fulfilled two of the principal goals set by President Reagan when he first proposed such a meeting in a speech to the United Nations only 4 months earlier. These were a strongly worded condemnation by all 149 nations represented of any uses of chemical weapons, as well as a renewed commitment to securing a ban on their production and stockpiling, which has been under negotiation at Geneva since the early 1970s.

U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz said shortly before leaving Paris that the meeting had been a success, in that "the general objective of raising consciousness about the problem of chemical weapons will undoubtedly give an additional push to the negotiations at Geneva."

In the long term, however, there was a widespread feeling that the most significant achievement of the meeting may have been less the noble sentiments expressed in its final communiqué than in its success at recasting chemical disarmament as no longer a predominantly East-West issue—the main perspective of negotiations over the past 20 years—but now equally as a North-South issue.

The United States has been trying to divert attention from its own decision to proceed with the production of binary weapons to the relatively new problem of the proliferation of chemical weapons capabilities in Third World countries. And these countries have, in turn, become increasingly tempted by the idea of chemical weapons as a deterrent. They have been raising their conditions for signing a global ban, including demands for guarantees of access to Western civilian chemical technology and of protection against states holding nuclear weapons.

Ironically, one of the implications of the shift from an East-West to a North-South perspective may, therefore, have been to reduce rather than enhance the chance of reaching early agreement on a global convention. "Because of the proliferation problem, this is the first time for many years that I have found myself growing less optimistic about the outcome" says one Dutch negotiator.

The Paris conference confirmed that, even though the United States and the Soviet Union continue to differ on many of the details they would like to see in an eventual convention, the gap between them continues to close. Indeed, according to several Western observers there is now virtual agreement between the two on all main issues of principle, ranging from acceptance of "challenge inspections" as the keystone of any verification regime, to the rate at which existing stockpiles would be destroyed on the two sides.

Further evidence of the Soviet Union's new enthusiasm for chemical disarmament came from some frank self-criticism by Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who told the meeting that if anyone were to tell his country that it had waited too long before stopping the production of chemical weapons, "we would say: yes, we did wait too long."


**Eduard Shevardnadze.** *Soviet foreign minister scored a public relations coup by announcing that the Soviet Union would begin destroying chemical stocks.*

Shevardnadze scored a major public relations coup by announcing that the Soviet Union would "proceed immediately to the elimination of our chemical weapons stockpiles" once a pilot destruction plant currently under construction at Chapayevsk, close to the Ural mountains, had been completed—perhaps in 3 to 4 months.

A senior U.S. official pointed out that the Department of Defense had been destroying its old chemical munitions since the early 1980s at its plant in Tooele, Utah, and will soon open a full-scale destruction facility at Johnston Island in the Pacific. "In effect what the U.S.S.R. is proposing is to catch up on what the U.S. has been doing, is doing and will be doing in the future," said the official.

Even some of those who accepted that the Soviet announcement added little to the negotiations, however, argued that the difficulties of persuading Third World countries to accept a global ban are only being enhanced by the U.S. Administration's apparent determination to proceed with the production of new binary weapons.

France, too, came under similar criticism for recent government statements indicating that it is contemplating the production of a new stock of chemical weapons. French President François Mitterrand confirmed a statement he had made to the United Nations in New York in September that France "has renounced the capability for producing chemical weapons." But he added that this would happen "from the date on which a future convention comes into force." It was pointed out in the corridors that this date is likely to remain at best several years away.

"When the smaller countries see two nations which already possess nuclear and conventional arsenals defend the acquisition of a new generation of chemical weapons on top, how do you expect them to resist the temptation to seek these weapons as well?" asked Egyptian diplomat Ezmat Ezz. "How can I ask my child to stop smoking if I am continuing to smoke myself?"

Arab states in particular pushed this argument strongly at the Paris conference. Several of these states already possess chemical munitions and have demonstrated a willingness to use them, and Syria is even thought to possess binaries. Given the widely held assumption that Israel currently possesses nuclear weapons, they argued that a global ban on the possession of chemical weapons would only by acceptable if linked to the question of nuclear nonproliferation.

"International security, both at a global

# A Plea for Scientific Help

The foreign ministers of West Germany and Italy have each appealed to the scientific community to play a more active role in debates about the procedures used to verify whether chemical weapons are being produced clandestinely, both in developed and developing countries. West German and Italian firms are suspected of providing Libya with some of the components used for the construction of an alleged chemical weapons factory.

Speaking at last week's international conference on chemical disarmament in Paris, West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his Italian counterpart Giulio Andreotti used virtually identical language to argue that a greater involvement by scientists in such debates could in the short term help prevent the proliferation of chemical weapons, and in the longer term contribute to a worldwide ban on their production and use.

Genscher's remarks came soon after it was announced that German experts had agreed to meet with State Department officials in Washington to discuss the evidence claimed by the U.S. Administration to substantiate its allegations about the Libyan plant—evidence that some sources suggest may have been provided by European technicians employed in the plant's construction.

He urged the scientific community "to make their entire know-how available so that we can solve the still unsettled questions concerning a global ban on chemical weapons, especially the related verification issues." He added that "life and dignity, as well as the moral credibility of the international community, are at stake."

Genscher's words were echoed by Andreotti, who said that the problems posed by verification were difficult, but not impossible, to resolve. "Technical complexity cannot, and should not, be used as an alibi to delay the resolution of what is essentially a political problem, since it is based on the question of confidence between states," he said.

Andreotti said that an experimental inspection carried out last month of two Italian chemical companies by an international team of scientists had demonstrated that "it is certainly possible to envisage an efficient regime for the collection of data, for verification and for inspection." Members of the team provided a variety of suggestions that Italy intends to submit to the chemical disarmament negotiations in Geneva.

While the remarks of Genscher and Andreotti were being interpreted by some observers at the Paris conference as an attempt to stimulate greater self-policing by their respective chemical industries, they were also seen as an attempt to address one of the major items still to be resolved in any eventual treaty, namely how to reassure private chemical companies that inspections for the clandestine production of weapons can be effectively carried out without compromising industrial secrets.

The Soviet Union withdrew its objection to "challenge inspections" 2 years ago, but there are some signs that the United States may be watering down its own earlier commitment to an open inspection regime because of opposition from parts of the chemical industry.

U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz admitted at a press conference during the Paris meeting that the industry "will have to accept a degree of openness and inspection that may cause them some heartburn," adding that "this is one of the problems that will have to be confronted" before a treaty is finalized.

Some parts of the scientific community have already been actively engaged in promoting the argument that the chemical industry has little to fear from a properly regulated verification regime. Members of the Pugwash organization, for example, which has been directly involved in operating trial inspections in several countries, have proposed a series of international cooperative projects focusing on the effectiveness of monitoring techniques.

Others, however, suggest that scientists could be doing considerably more, for example in helping to make the public case in support of verification procedures. "I am not sure that the scientific community has been as active or as vocal as it could have been on the chemical weapons issue," says a senior staff member with the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, adding that the question of the adequacy of verification techniques is "the type of area in which more scientists could make a contribution." ■ **D.D.**

and a regional level, is an indivisible whole," said Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Esmat Meguid. "It would therefore not be logical for the international community to allow some countries situated in the most sensitive regions of the world to endow themselves with the nuclear option without the least international control, while this same international community requires the total banning of chemical weapons."

Any attempt at direct linkage between chemical and nuclear disarmament negotiations, however, was strongly opposed as both undesirable and impractical by most Western delegations, in particular the United States. Thus, despite strong pressure from the Arab and non-aligned countries to include a reference to the need for such linkage in the final communiqué, it spoke only of the need to pursue the goal of "general disarmament" through international controls guaranteeing the right of all states to "peace and security."

Fears that barely suppressed tensions might lead to a collapse of the conference proved unfounded. And many delegates claimed that by reconfirming the importance of the Geneva protocol, as well as their support for the United Nations as the principal policing body, the 149 nations present had significantly reduced the chances that the use of chemical weapons will spread rapidly in Third World countries.

But the papering-over of differences in the final communiqué—achieved largely as a result of intense diplomatic efforts by the French government—may be torn apart in the hard bargaining that remains in Geneva before a global ban on chemical weapons can be concluded.

In these circumstances, some are suggesting that a more appropriate first step might be a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, based on direct negotiations that have been taking place in Geneva in parallel with the multilateral bargaining. A bilateral deal "could well be a good thing right now," says one British observer, suggesting it would set an example that Third World countries might be persuaded to follow.

Others, however, argue that a bilateral agreement might reduce pressure for a global convention, and would contribute little to the resolution of the North-South differences that the convention will require. "The time has come to take concerted political action at the highest level," said U.N. Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar. "Without a powerful political momentum, the negotiations will not be able to reach agreement; and without a global convention, there will be no final elimination of chemical weapons." ■ **DAVID DICKSON**