

Chemical Warfare: Panel Promotes Binaries

The U.S. defensive policy with regard to chemical warfare has been marked by indecision for some years, with the Administration repeatedly resisting Defense Department pressure to modernize the country's stocks of nerve gas. There now appears to be momentum building in favor of a decision to replace these stocks with binary weapons, which mix to form lethal nerve gas only after a projectile has been launched.

The Defense Science Board last month convened a panel that met for 2 weeks in San Diego to take a comprehensive—and, some say, long overdue—look at America's posture with regard to chemical weapons. According to John Deutch of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who headed the meeting, the group came to a threefold conclusion; they agreed that it is time to deactivate existing unitary nerve gas weapons, to replace them with limited stocks of binary weapons, and to upgrade protection and training for troops.

The government has not been able to decide what to do about chemical weapons stockpiles in Colorado and Utah, but Deutch says there was a "strong feeling" among members of the panel that "the government face up to its responsibility," which would entail spending perhaps \$4 billion to demilitarize the stocks.

The panel believes the United States cannot rely either on its supply of nuclear weapons or on conventional armaments to deter Soviet use of chemical weapons. The members concluded that if the Soviets decide on first use of such weapons, the means must be at hand to compel their troops to bundle up in protective gear too, and also to pose a threat to their airports and other rearward support operations.

The group, which will be issuing a report within a month, also wants a good deal more attention paid to anti-chemical warfare equipment and training and to research on effects of nerve agents and antidotes.

Deutch says the group did not agree with the objections of chemical weapons expert Matthew Meselson of Harvard, who fears that replacing

existing stocks with binary weapons will make them appear to be more palatable. Nor did the group think that the increased safety in handling of binaries would make their use more attractive to terrorists and other subnational groups, since these groups do not have much of a hang-up about safety anyway.

The panel also disagreed with Meselson's contention that U.S. entry into production of binary weapons will make the Soviets more suspicious of us and cause them to drop whatever restraints they have been exercising on their production and use. Deutch says the panel believes there is "substantial evidence of Soviet activity with chemical weapons now" and that, if anything, a decision to go binary is likely to make them more eager to arrive at an anti-chemical warfare accord, for which negotiations are now under way in Geneva.

The National Security Council is currently engaged in a study which will recommend on whether existing weapons should be replaced by binary weapons. No doubt the unanimous conclusion of the recent meeting will carry considerable influence in these deliberations.

France Seeks European Team to Develop Breeder

An important stage in the French breeder reactor program was marked on 21 August when the 700-metric ton steel cauldron that will hold the core of the Super-Phénix reactor was swung into position at Creys-Malville, 60 kilometers east of Lyon.

The 1200-megawatt reactor is a European project under French leadership. Last month France decided to increase the European character of her breeder program by inviting Britain to participate in the development of the next breeder, a 1500-megawatt reactor with better production costs.

The partnership would make sense, not least because the two countries' breeder technologies are very similar. But France is asking for a \$50-million entry fee. If the British government pays, it will face furious criticism from those who believe British breeder technology is on the same level with that of France.

Remember the Elephant

Ivory from elephant tusks is commonly known as the "bullion" of the wildlife products trade. With worldwide inflation climbing, ivory now competes as an investment with jewels, art, and antiques. The price of ivory reached \$34 a pound this year, up from \$2.30 in 1970.

The poaching and smuggling of African elephants has, not unsurprisingly, reached massive proportions. In fact, most ivory now entering world trade comes from poached elephants.



World Wildlife Fund photo

The World Wildlife Fund, which recently helped sponsor a 3-year survey of African elephants, has just announced a \$1.1 million fund-raising campaign to combat the illegal ivory trade. In announcing its "African elephant action plan," the organization said that 50,000 to 150,000 elephants are being killed illegally each year from a total African population of about 1.3 million elephants. Zaire, although it is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, is the principal offender.

The elephant campaign will include direct measures for conservation and habitat protection, lobbying of governments to strengthen enforcement of wildlife laws, and attempts to introduce conservation education programs into African schools. Some money will also go for protection of Asian elephants, of which no more than 20,000 remain.

Constance Holden