
Defense Report

AUSA



Poison Gas: Outlawed?

Although World War II American soldiers carried gas masks and protective clothing through much of the war, they did not spend much time worrying about poison gas nor were they ever faced with a gas attack. This may not be true next time, if the next time involves war with the USSR.

The Soviet Union today is better equipped militarily and psychologically for chemical warfare, especially with nerve gas, than any nation in the world. The Red Army organizational structure, doctrine, training, and emphasis on individual and unit proficiency in gas warfare indicates readiness to fight in such an environment.

Intelligence sources say that Soviet military commanders consider gas to be one of the best means of killing the enemy in modern combat. Their planners use chemical warfare as an integral part of their proposed tactical operations. Further, the Soviets have the technology, stockpiles, and the manufacturing base to sustain chemical warfare operations on a very large scale.

USSR seriousness about the use of gas in combat is demonstrated by the fact that their chemical troops number nearly 80,000—one-tenth of the strength of the entire U.S. Army. By contrast, it is estimated that there are about 2,000 U.S. chemical warfare troops. The Soviets have chemical personnel organic in their military organizations down to regiment—the equivalent of a U.S. Army Brigade, which has no chemical troops.

The Soviets can deliver chemical munitions with rockets, missiles, aircraft, and large caliber artillery. In their field maneuvers, they constantly practice realistic offensive and defensive chemical warfare. Large scale decontamination exercises are held regularly in addition to regular training exercises. As was learned from vehicles captured during the 1973 Israeli War, their personnel carriers, tanks, and command post vehicles are designed to fight in a chemical environment with minimum personnel losses.

The extent of Soviet preparations for the use of gas in combat, unequalled by any other nation, coupled with intelligence revelations concerning their chemical warfare tactical doctrine, strongly suggests that despite any treaties they may sign, they will ruthlessly use gas in combat when it will give them a military advantage.