

3 of 11 DOCUMENTS

The Washington Post

February 11, 1997, Tuesday, Final Edition

## End the Chemical Weapons Business

Brent Scowcroft; John M. Deutch

**SECTION:** OP-ED; Pg. A21**LENGTH:** 1060 words

In the coming weeks, the Senate will vote on whether the United States should ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), an international agreement that bans chemical weapons and mandates the destruction of all existing chemical weapons stocks. As the Senate considers this issue, two facts ought to frame the debate. First, the United States will eliminate its own chemical weapons capability whether or not it ratifies the CWC. Second, the CWC will enter into force whether or not the United States ratifies it.

These two facts make the question facing the Senate a relatively narrow and straightforward one: Are U.S. national interests better served if we ratify and become party to the CWC, or if we remain outside the international regime that outlaws chemical weapons?

We have already voted to take ourselves out of the chemical weapons business. Under a 1985 law signed by President Reagan, the United States will destroy its existing chemical weapons stockpile (much of which is nearly 50 years old, and most of which is in danger of leaking or is otherwise unusable) by 2004. In the face of repeated refusals by Congress to provide the funds, plans to modernize our chemical weapons also were abandoned in 1991. The net result is that, in a few years, we will have completed the unilateral dismantling of our chemical weapons capabilities. By outlawing chemical weapons, the CWC helps put other nations in the same position we already have put ourselves.

Moreover, with or without us, the CWC -- which has been ratified by more than 65 countries, including virtually all of our friends and allies -- will enter into force on April 29. Refusal by the Senate to ratify the treaty, or the addition of "killer amendments" to the resolution of ratification, will block U.S. participation but will not stop the CWC. However, rejecting a treaty of which we were the primary architects and instead lining up with pariah states such as Libya, Iran and North Korea would do real damage to America's international leadership, credibility, and interests:

By remaining outside the CWC, we let these rogue states off the hook by making it easier for them to ignore pressures to abandon the chemical weapons option. Perhaps more to the point, it gives Russia -- which has the world's largest stock of chemical weapons -- an easy excuse to delay further its own accession to the CWC. In all these cases, we undermine the effectiveness of the CWC to do unto others what we already have decided to do for ourselves: get out of the chemical weapons business.

If we remain outside the CWC, our own chemical industry will pay a price. The CWC prohibits its signatories from trading in certain categories of chemicals with companies in countries that remain non-members. These provisions could put the American chemical industry at a competitive disadvantage, not least by significantly complicating transactions between U.S. chemical manufacturers and their offshore facilities and subsidiaries. That is one reason why the industry supports CWC ratification.

If we fail to join the CWC by April 29, the United States will not get a seat on the "Executive Council," which decides the real world "rules of the road" that shape how the treaty actually gets implemented, or on the CWC's "Technical Secretariat" from which the international inspectors who verify compliance will be drawn.

The Clinton administration insists that the CWC is "effectively verifiable" as that term has been officially construed, while critics insist that the treaty does not fit the plain meaning of those words. But arcane debates about various definitions of "effectively verifiable" miss the point. The limits imposed by the CWC surely are imperfect, but since we are unilaterally abandoning chemical weapons in any case, it is hard to see how its imperfect constraints are worse than no constraints at all. Even more to the point, the CWC can help us deal more effectively with the real-world verification problem we do face: By joining the CWC, we can take advantage of its inspection procedures and reporting requirements to make our own intelligence capabilities more effective, increasing the chances that we will catch the cheaters.

The right way to judge CWC is not as some kind of "silver bullet," but rather as one part of a comprehensive approach to fighting chemical weapons proliferation. The effectiveness of that overall approach also depends on several additional actions that should be included in the Senate's review of the treaty:

- (1) We must ensure that our military forces continue to be equipped and trained to defend themselves -- both passively and actively -- against possible chemical weapons attacks.
- (2) We should reaffirm that we are prepared to draw on the full panoply of our military capabilities if U.S. territory or forces are ever attacked with chemical weapons.
- (3) We should reject interpretations of the CWC that prohibit the use of tear gas or other nonlethal chemicals, so that we do not put ourselves in the bizarre position of having no choice but to rely on guns and bullets when we face situations like driving off non-combatants who might be threatening a downed pilot.
- (4) We must ensure that intelligence collection and analysis of chemical weapons threats, as well as improvements to our CWC monitoring and verification capabilities, continue to receive high priority.
- (5) We must organize our capacity to deal with possible terrorist use of chemicals both at home and abroad.
- (6) We must ensure that the CWC is not exploited to facilitate the diffusion of CWC-specific technology, equipment, and material -- even to signatory states.

In sum, CWC is no cure-all, but this CWC clearly serves U.S. interests. Even more to the point, this CWC will enter into force in about three months, with or without us. The central question before the Senate is whether the national interest is better served by the United States joining the CWC or remaining outside it. The answer to that question is a clear and emphatic "yes."

Brent Scowcroft, president of the Forum for International Policy, was national security adviser to Presidents Ford and Bush. John M. Deutch, institute professor at MIT, served as director of Central Intelligence and deputy secretary of defense in the Clinton administration.

**LOAD-DATE:** February 11, 1997

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** Illustration, t. gibson