

1997

Chemical Weapons Treaty: Two Views-Keep U.S. Deterrents Credible

Porcher L. Taylor III

University of Richmond, ptaylor@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/spcs-faculty-publications>



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Taylor, Porcher L. "Chemical Weapons Treaty: Two Views-Keep U.S. Deterrents Credible." *Journal of Commerce*, 1997, 7A.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Professional and Continuing Studies at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Professional and Continuing Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

Chemical weapons treaty: two views

Keep US deterrents credible

BY PORCHER TAYLOR

President Clinton recently offered to make a written pledge to include the nuclear option in the retaliation package against any adversary that attacks U.S. troops with poison gas.

It was part of his effort to co-opt hard-line Republicans in the Senate into ratifying the Chemical Weapons Convention.

And, in fact, the Senate has headed in this general direction. Last week the Senate approved a bill under which the United States would take a unilateral approach to fighting the spread of chemical weapons. The bill would require U.S. sanctions against other countries using chemical and biological weapons.

However, since the convention becomes operable international law for at least 65 ratifying nations on April 29 with or without U.S. ratification, we also should

retain a nuclear-option retaliation strategy against a chemical strike.

Mr. Clinton should make nuclear retaliation a credible deterrent. This is a key leadership challenge for a second-term president who still lacks a coherent national security policy.

In mulling his options, Mr. Clinton should study the three historical cases where Western leaders who, with bold retaliatory pronouncements, stopped two dictators from unleashing the poison gas beast.

In 1942, a desperate Soviet Union feared that Adolf Hitler would use poison gas against its armies, and appealed to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill for assistance. With his trademark audacity, Mr. Churchill told Hitler that the "unprovoked use of poison gas against our Russian ally" would constitute an attack on Britain. Moreover, Mr. Churchill

proclaimed that Britain would use its air supremacy in the West "to carry gas warfare on the largest possible scale far and wide against military objectives in Germany."

Similarly, on June 8, 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt told the Axis powers in Old Testament style and proportions that "full and swift retaliation in kind" against Axis "military objectives" would follow if the Axis powers used poison gas.

Some military scholars contend that the Allies' "eye for an eye" strategy may have accounted for the Nazis not using poison gas during World War II.

With the haunting memory still fresh in their minds of Germany's devastating chlorine and mustard gas attacks during WWI, which caused more than 1 million Allied casualties, U.S. military commanders were intent on denying Hitler the opportunity to do it again.

Nearly 50 years later, evidence suggests that the United States successfully faced down Saddam Hussein over poison gas. Analysts believe Iraq did not use chemical weapons against coalition troops in the 1991 Gulf War because it feared U.S. nuclear retaliation.

Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf admitted at a Senate committee hearing in January that the United States planned to "blow away" Hussein's military with nuclear weapons should he use chemical weapons against coalition troops.

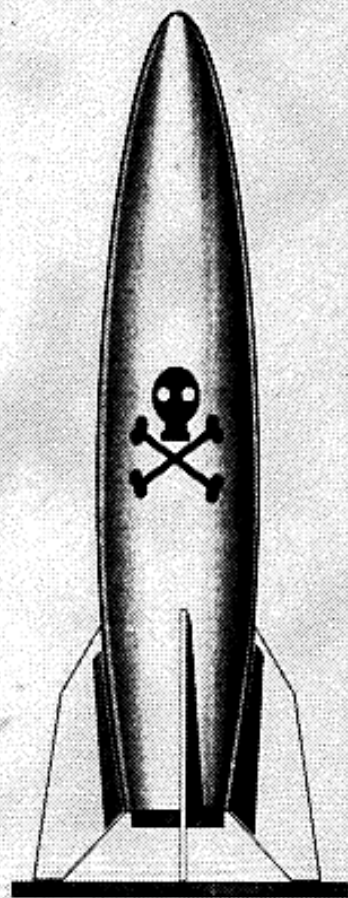
Nuclear counterthreats against enemies who pose a threat to vital U.S. security

interests are not new. The 1995 book "Nonproliferation Primer" says U.S. presidents have used nuclear weapons threats more than 20 times since 1945 against belligerents in Indochina, East Asia, Berlin and the Middle East with mixed deterrent results.

Hopefully, Washington would never have to carry out the threat, although the possibility remains that a terrorist group or rogue nation could launch a massive chemical attack against American targets. Future presidents should make strong retaliatory pronouncements to deter anyone from even contemplating this.

Twice in this century Washington stopped two tyrants from unleashing their poison gas arsenals. We cannot afford to lose this deterrent legacy.

Porcher Taylor is an adjunct professor of law and leadership at the University of Richmond and an adjunct fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. This article was distributed by Scripps Howard News Service.



TOM LYNN/The Journal of Commerce