

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Chemical ban pretext for global police state

Formation of a supranational "environmental" policing operation, along the lines called for by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov at the United Nations on Dec. 7, 1988, may be the purpose behind convening the 130 nations scheduled to participate in the Conference on Chemical Weapons Use in Paris Jan. 7-11.

Gen. William Burns, director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), told reporters at the State Department on the eve of the conference that it would have no binding authority, but that he hoped it would "carry over" into changes in the charter of the United Nations.

The aim would be, he said, to give greater powers to the U.N. secretary general to investigate allegations of chemical weapons use throughout the world.

Such powers would involve the ability of the U.N. to impose stiff economic sanctions on any nation that did not cooperate with an investigation. General Burns said that the need for such enhanced powers was demonstrated last year, when U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar wanted to look into allegations of chemical weapons use by the government of Iraq against Kurdish rebels, and the Iraqi government would not permit the delegation to enter the country.

However, Washington sources point out that the sudden preoccupation with chemical weapons is coherent with the move toward an enhanced global policing role for the U.N. as part of the emerging U.S.-Soviet "condominium" arrangement.

The new drive is not merely the result of use of such weapons in the

Iran-Iraq war, or allegations that Libya is building a chemical weapons production facility. Such developments overlook the fact that the Soviets used chemical weapons widely in Afghanistan, and that the Cubans reportedly also used them in Angola. In fact, the Soviets have been producing and exporting chemical weapons for 45 years, experts note.

Gorbachov's call has been echoed in remarks by President-elect George Bush, who has said he intends to make a chemical weapons ban, and environmental issues generally, top priorities for his administration.

Carrying out a global ban on chemical weapons production would require an environmentalist policing apparatus, because of the special problems of verification associated with such a policy. Since virtually every kind of industrial plant can be converted into a chemical weapons production facility, verification would require frequent inspections of virtually every industrial facility in the world.

General Burns conceded this when I asked him about it at the State Department press conference. He said that such tough questions are being grappled with at the talks on banning conventional weapons now going on in Geneva, which involve 40 nations which have agreed to find a way to ban chemical weapons use, stockpiling, and manufacturing.

"No one has an answer to that problem yet," Burns replied. "But I can tell you the solution would be highly intrusive."

In an interview given to the *New York Times* earlier the same day, Burns noted that a draft treaty to ban chemical weapons offered by the United States in 1984 included "wide-ranging inspections to ensure that factories that make pesticides or handle chemicals are not making chemical weapons,"

and that the successful negotiation of such a policy has been long and arduous.

You can picture what the result would be like. Imagine U.N. inspection agents empowered to go, at will, into any industrial plant in any nation of the world. If they didn't like the political posture of a particular nation, they could declare its industrial capabilities "a threat to global security," and force it to close them down, on penalty of an economic embargo or worse.

Goodbye, national sovereignty

The mandate for such a policing agency would be rapidly expanded beyond preventing chemical weapons production, to preventing anything deemed to be a crime against the environment. Such an agency would be capable of bringing industrialization to a halt wherever it would arbitrarily choose.

The Paris conference is designed to build momentum toward this kind of arrangement. It is organized on a "lowest common denominator" basis, namely, in support of the language of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which bans only the use (not the manufacture or stockpiling) of chemical weapons.

This, Burns said, was in order to attract the largest possible number of participants to five days of speeches on the need to surrender national sovereignty to the higher goal of making the world safe from proliferation of chemical weapons.

The conference will serve as a spur to move the Geneva negotiations along, and to get the U.N. to sharpen the teeth of its charter. In addition, analysts here are speculating that the Soviets are not above ordering the use of chemical weapons by a client state like Libya, in some heinous incident to help speed along the process.