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The world has witnessed a change in government in Syria, a country long scrutinized by the international community and organizations such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations. During this period, both the former Syrian government and rebel groups accused each other of using chemical weapons. However, the inquiry committees of the OPCW were unable to reach a conclusive determination. The status of any concealed weapons, if they exist, continues to pose security uncertainties.

Similarly, the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia is marked by accusations and counter-accusations regarding the use of chemical and biological weapons, as well as the existence of manufacturing facilities in both countries. The West has also accused Russia of assassinating some of its opposition leaders in exile. In December 2024, Igor Kirillov, Russia's chief of chemical weapons, was killed in a bomb blast allegedly orchestrated by Russia's enemies. Kirillov had faced allegations of using chemical weapons in Ukraine, although these claims have not been independently verified.

The U.S. State Department has alerted the international community to China's military research on marine toxins, raising concerns about their potential use in future biological warfare. According to the report, such activities could violate Article 1 of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), to which China has been a signatory since 1984. The report also notes that while China submits annual compliance reports under the Convention, these reports do not disclose the development of biological agents with military applications.

This issue of CBW Magazine addresses several pressing concerns related to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Malcolm Dando and Simon Whitby, in their paper, argue that while a near-term strengthening of the BWC seems unlikely, any future opportunity will require adopting mechanisms such as declarations, visits, and inspections-similar to those under the CWC-to ensure its effectiveness. Vivek Chaddha's article provides an overview of efforts by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to strengthen measures against proliferation financing.

Nachiket Kondhalkar's paper examines the erosion of trust in international arms control frameworks and the challenges of preventing chemical weapons proliferation in conflict zones. Aayushi Sharma explores how greater civil society participation within the OPCW can help reinforce the principles of the CWC, particularly in addressing non-proliferation and prevention challenges.

Abhishek Verma discusses the U.S. Department's imposition of sanctions on over 280 individuals and entities affiliated with the Russian Federation for allegedly using chloropicrin against Ukrainian forces during the Russia-Ukraine War. Interestingly, the OPCW issued a press release stating that the allegations were "insufficiently substantiated" based on the information available to its Secretariat.

Saman Ayesha Kidwai reviews Mrinmayee Bhushan's book *Silent Weapons Deadly Weapons: Unveiling the Bioweapons Arms Race* (Pathak Publishers and Distributors, 2024). She highlights the book's timely exploration of the evolving threat landscape posed by chemical and biological weapons (CBW) and toxins.

This issue of CBW Magazine also features sections like "Chemical-Biological News." With feedback from our readers, we aim to publish future editions focusing on topics of particular concern.

The Chemical Weapons Convention as a Model for WMD Elimination: A Civil Society Perspective on the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Negotiations of a Verification Protocol 1994 - 2001

Dr. Malcolm Dando and Dr. Simon Whitby, *University of Bradford, UK*

Summary

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that two decades have been wasted due to the persistent weakness of a crucial component of the Web of Prevention—the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). Furthermore, with the destruction of chemical weapons now complete, it is evident that both the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the BTWC face the shared challenge of preventing the resurgence of these weapon systems. They are also inherently connected in addressing the threat posed by toxin and bio-regulatory weapons. Although a rapid strengthening of the BTWC seems unlikely at present, when the opportunity arises, it will likely require adopting key mechanisms such as declarations, visits, and inspections, similar to those of the CWC, to ensure its effectiveness.

1. Introduction

In reflecting on the 9th Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) of 2022, Ambassador Leonardo Bencini, the President, noted that despite the difficulties there had been significant achievements.¹ These included:

“We established a Working Group tasked with identifying, examining and developing measures to strengthen the Convention and improve its implementation. No issue would be off the table at this Working Group, including compliance and verification – the issue at the heart of the previous deadlock – and the possibility of legally binding measures.”

While rapid progress is unlikely in the present international situation, it can be hoped that States Parties to the Convention will be able to take up this task again in the coming years. Numerous detailed assessments of problem compliance and verification, and of possible solutions, have been made in recent years,² but as we were involved as members of civil society in efforts to help strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) almost 30 years ago, it seemed reasonable also to offer some historical reflections on the topic. This is not, of course, to suggest that we can necessarily learn anything from history, but that it is as well to be aware of it.

2. History 1994 - 2001

In September 1994, a Special Conference of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) agreed on a mandate for further negotiation to strengthen the Convention. The Mandate stated, in part, that:³

“...the Conference, determined to strengthen the effectiveness and improve

the implementation of the Convention and recognizing that effective verification could reinforce the Convention, decides to establish an Ad Hoc Group, open to all States Parties. *The objective of this Ad Hoc Group shall be to consider appropriate measures, including possible verification measures, and draft proposals to strengthen the Convention, to be included, as appropriate, in a legally binding instrument, to be submitted for the consideration of the States Parties. In this context, the Ad Hoc Group shall, inter alia consider:*

.... A system of measures to promote compliance with the Convention, including, as appropriate, measures identified, examined and evaluated in the VEREX Report. *Such measures should apply to all relevant facilities and activities, be reliable, cost effective, non-discriminatory and as non-intrusive as possible, consistent with the effective implementation of the system and should not lead to abuse....*" (Emphases added)

These negotiations ended in failure in 2001 when Ambassador Donald Mahley of the United States rejected the draft Protocol text in a *Statement* that, in part, noted:⁴

"...One overarching concern is the inherent difficulty of crafting a mechanism suitable to address the unique biological weapons threat. *The traditional approach that has worked well for many other types of weapons is not a workable structure for biological weapons...*

The draft Protocol will not improve our ability to verify BWC compliance. It will not enhance our confidence in compliance and will do little to deter those countries seeking to develop biological weapons. In our assessment, the draft Protocol would put national security and confidential business information at risk." (Emphasis added)

The components of the "traditional approach" were set out clearly with their rationale by a former Deputy Director for Intelligence at the US Central Intelligence Agency and been Chief of the US Arms Control and Intelligence Staff before that. In his opinion the traditional approach consisted of declarations, routine and challenge inspections as had been used in previous arms control agreements including the recently agreed Chemical Weapons Convention.⁵

In 2010, Ambassador Mahley expanded on the reasoning behind his 2001 Statement noting, interestingly, that one issue of concern to the US was that many saw the Chemical Weapons Convention as a model for the Protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention:⁶

"A second albatross around the neck of the BWC Protocol negotiations, though it was not apparent at the outset, was the CWC. The CWC, opened for signature in 1993, became a model for the BWC Protocol in the eyes of many of the most committed Western delegations..." (Emphasis added).

That viewpoint would appear to be fully consistent with the 2001 *Statement*. However, his further reflections went on to suggest that the situation in the US Administration during the Ad Hoc Group negotiations was much more complex and contributed to the failure:⁷

"...Concluding a Protocol was never a priority objective for senior political leadership in the US Executive Branch. While *the issue had a few avid followers, it was not discussed in substantive detail, and particularly not regularly, at senior (cabinet, or immediate sub- cabinet) levels, and there was not government-wide cabinet-level agency internal direction to devote the considerable attention and resources necessary to formulate USG*

alternatives to the approaches being espoused by other countries. The results were debilitating to the negotiations, both nationally and internationally.”

Importantly, he added further that:

“Nationally, the shortcoming came as agencies did the homework to determine that proposals currently being discussed in Geneva – usually developed by trying to draw parallels with the CWC, adapted by a country having fewer complicating domestic concerns than the US – were not satisfactory answers to the issues they attempted to address. That allowed the US to act as a sharp critic of the proposals under consideration. *What did not happen was the necessary effort to say “These ideas will not work. Now what ideas can we develop and propose as alternatives that will work?”* (Emphases added)

Therefore, on this account, the US Administration was not united in its view of the impossibility of improving confidence in compliance under the mandate agreed for the Ad Hoc Group, and no serious study of potential alternatives was conducted. Nevertheless, that remained the US position and a stalemate ensured for two decades, with, as has often been noted, some of the States that had appeared to be dragging their feet during the negotiations surprisingly becoming avid advocates of verification.⁸

The situation only changed after the US Statement at the 2022 9th BTWC Review Conference that:⁹

“...There are also harder issues before us; issues that will take more time and effort to address. How do we strengthen implementation of the Convention and enhance mutual assurance of compliance? These are not simple questions.... *We also need to explore what measures – yes, including possible verification measures – might be effective in today’s context...*” (Emphasis added)

The current attempts to investigate these questions will necessarily have to take into account the changes that have occurred since the turn of the century, particularly the rapid advances that have been made in the life and associated sciences, but that does not mean that all of the work that was done during the period of the Ad Hoc Group is irrelevant now. For that reason, the intention here is to briefly review and analyse one Civil Society project that was designed to provide material that could be of use during the Ad Hoc Group negotiations. The position taken by those involved was similar to that of Johnathan Tucker in the conclusion to his comparative analysis of the CWC provisions and the potential BTWC Protocol, that is, that despite the differences:¹⁰

“...Like the chemical treaty, the BWC protocol should establish a set of mutually reinforcing measures ranging from facility declarations to on-site inspections. In addition, the BWC protocol should adopt a CWC-like system of “carrots” and “sticks” to reward states that comply with the treaty while punishing those that remain outside or that fail to adhere to its provisions.”

The Bradford project described and analysed here continued to provide input to the BTWC meetings in Geneva following the cessation of the Ad Hoc Group, but that work is not covered here.

3. The Bradford University Project on Strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention: Description

Dr Graham Pearson retired in 1995 after ten years as Director General and Chief Executive of the UK Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down. He had been a UK Expert at the VEREX meetings in 1992 and 1993 and at the Special Conference to which it reported in 1994. He was thus very familiar with the issues

involved in the Ad Hoc Group negotiations when a little later he joined the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford in the UK as a Visiting Professor. With colleagues at Bradford, other UK colleagues, particularly Dr Nicholas Sims at the London School of Economics, and others from around the world he led a project on strengthening the BTWC for twenty years and was eventually awarded an Honorary Degree by the University for the work he produced on this important issue.

The core of the project was to produce relevant papers for the diplomats in Geneva and other interested parties. These papers were all produced in a distinctive recognisable style (for example, all had a pale green cover and standard presentation of the contents). The first series of *Briefing Papers* began in 1997 and ran to number 33 in February 2001¹¹ (see Table 1).

Table 1: The First Series of Bradford Briefing Papers

1 Graham S. Pearson: On-Site Investigations
July 1997

2 Graham S. Pearson: The Necessity for Non-Challenge Visits
Sept 1997

3 Graham S. Pearson: Discriminating Triggers for Mandatory Declarations
Sept 1997

4 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims: National Implementation Measures
Jan 1998

5 Graham S. Pearson: An Optimum Organisation
Jan 1998

6 Graham S. Pearson: Article X: Some Building Blocks
Mar 1998

7 Graham S. Pearson: Article X: Further Building Blocks
Mar 1998

8 Graham S. Pearson: Article X: Pharmaceutical Building Blocks
July 1998

9 Graham S. Pearson: Article X: Specific Measures to Achieve Implementation
July 1998

10 Graham S. Pearson: The Strengthened BTWC Protocol: An Integrated Regime
July 1998

11 J. P. Perry Robinson: The CWC Verification Regime: Implications for the Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industry
July 1998

12 Graham S. Pearson: Article III: Some Building Blocks
Oct 1998

13 Graham S. Pearson: Article III: Further Building Blocks
Oct 1998

14 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims: National Implementation Measures: An Update
Oct 1998

15 an R. Kenyon: Non-Compliance Concern Investigations: Initiation Procedures
Oct 1998

16 Graham S. Pearson: The BTWC Protocol Implementation: Practical Considerations
Oct 1998

17 Malcolm R. Dando: The Strengthened BTWC Protocol: Implications for the Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industry
Oct 1998

18 Graham S. Pearson & Malcolm R. Dando: Visits: An Essential and Effective Pillar
Jan 1999

19 Daniel Feakes: The Future BTWC Organization: Some Observations from the OPCW
Jan 1999

20 Graham S. Pearson: Visits: An Essential Portfolio
Apr 1999

21 Mark Wheelis: Outbreaks of Disease: Current Official Reporting
Apr 1999

22 Graham S. Pearson: Article VII Measures: Optimizing the Benefits
July 1999

23 Graham S. Pearson: BTWC Security Implications of Human, Animal and Plant Epidemiology
July 1999

24 Philip van Dalen: Outbreaks of Disease: Current European Reporting
Sept 1999

25 Graham S. Pearson & Malcolm R. Dando: The Emerging BTWC Protocol: An Integrated Reliable and Effective Regime
Sept 1999

26 Graham S. Pearson: Visits: The Emerging Portfolio
Nov 1999

27 Graham S. Pearson: The Emerging Protocol: A Quantified Evaluation of the Regime
Nov 1999

28 Graham S. Pearson: The BTWC Protocol: Improving the Implementation of Article III of the Convention
Jan 2000

29 Graham S. Pearson: Maximizing Security Benefits from Technical Cooperation in Microbiology and Biotechnology
July 2000

30 Ian R. Kenyon & Nicholas A. Sims: Draft Resolution Establishing the Preparatory Commission for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Biological Weapons
July 2000

31 Daniel Feakes & Ian R. Kenyon: The CWC Paris Resolution: Unresolved Issues
July 2000

32 Graham S. Pearson: Scientific and Technical Implications of the Implementation of the BTWC Protocol
Nov 2000

33 Graham S. Pearson: The BTWC Protocol: Improving the Implementation of Article III of the Convention: Pragmatic Considerations

A wide range of expert authors contributed to this first series of *Briefing Papers* and many different issues of relevance were produced. As the negotiations progressed, a new set of *Evaluation Papers* began in 1999 and contained 22 papers by August 2001. These papers were produced by Graham Pearson and Nicholas Sims (Table 2).

Table 2: The Bradford Evaluation Papers

1 Graham S. Pearson: The BTWC Protocol: An Overall Evaluation
July 1999

2 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims: Article X: National Implementation Measures
July 1999

3 Nicholas A. Sims: Articles XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX and XXIII: Status of the Annexes and Appendices, Signature, Ratification, Accession and Authentic Texts
Sept 1999

4 Nicholas A. Sims: Article XV: Duration and Withdrawal
Sept 1999

5 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Article XX: Entry into Force
Sept 1999

6 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sim:
Article XXI: Reservations
Sept 1999

7 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Article XXII: Depositary/ies
Sept 1999

8 Nicholas A. Sims: Article V: Measures to
Redress a Situation and to Ensure
Compliance
Nov 1999

9 Nicholas A. Sims: Article XI: Relationship
of the Protocol to the BTWC and Other
International Agreements
Nov 1999

10 Nicholas A. Sims: Article XII: Settlement
of Disputes
Nov 1999

11 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Article XIII: Review of the Protocol
Nov 1999

12 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Article XIV: Amendments
Jan 2000

13 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Article VI: Assistance and Protection
Against Biological and Toxin Weapons
Jan 2000

14 Ian R. Kenyon, Graham S. Pearson &
Nicholas A. Sims: Article IX: The
Organization
Jan 2000

15 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Preamble
Mar 2000

16 Graham S. Pearson & Nicholas A. Sims:
Article IV: Confidentiality Provisions
Mar 2000

17 Graham S. Pearson, Nicholas A. Sims,
Malcolm R. Dando & Ian R. Kenyon: The
BTWC Protocol: Proposed Complete Text for
an Integrated Regime
Mar 2000

18 Graham S. Pearson, Nicholas A. Sims,
Malcolm R. Dando & Ian R. Kenyon: The
BTWC Protocol: Revised Proposed Complete
Text for an Integrated Regime
July 2000

19 Graham S. Pearson, Nicholas A. Sims,
Malcolm R. Dando & Ian R. Kenyon The
BTWC Protocol: Proposed Complete Text for
an Integrated Regime
Sept 2000

20 Graham S. Pearson, Nicholas A. Sims &
Malcolm R. Dando: The Composite Protocol
Text: An Effective Strengthening of the
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
Apr 2001

21 Graham S. Pearson, Nicholas A. Sims &
Malcolm R. Dando: The Composite Protocol
Text: An Evaluation of the Costs and
Benefits to States Parties
July 2001

22 Graham S. Pearson, Nicholas A. Sims &
Malcolm R. Dando: The US Rejection of the
Composite Protocol: A Huge Mistake based
on Illogical Assessments
Aug 2001

Large Guides, *Key Points* for the 4th and the
5th Review Conference were also produced
under the project, and in 2001 a third series
of *Review Conference Papers* was also
initiated (Table 3).

Table 3: The Bradford Review Conference Papers

No.9 The Resumed Fifth BTWC Review Conference: Maximizing the Benefits from the Final Declaration, by Graham S. Pearson and Nicholas Sims, October 2002 in PDF 2002

No.8 Return to Geneva: Uncertainties and Options, by Graham S. Pearson and Nicholas Sims, October 2002 in PDF 2002

No.7 Return to Geneva: A Comprehensive List of Measures by Graham S. Pearson, August 2002 in PDF 2002

No.6 Return to Geneva: The United Kingdom Green Paper by Graham S. Pearson in PDF 2002

No.5 Return to Geneva: The Next Stage of the BTWC Fifth Review Conference by Nicholas A. Sims in PDF 2002

No.4 The US Statement at the Fifth Review Conference: Compounding the Error in Rejecting the Composite Protocol by Graham S. Pearson, Malcolm R. Dando & Nicholas A. Sims in PDF 2002

No.3 New Scientific and Technological Developments of Relevance to the Fifth Review Conference in PDF 2001

No.2 The Functions of the BTWC Review Conferences: Maximizing the Benefits from the Fifth Review Conference, Review Conference Paper No. 2, 2001 in PDF 2001

No.1 The Fifth BTWC Review Conference: Opportunities and Challenges, Review Conference Paper No. 1, 2001 in PDF 2001

These *Review Conference Papers*, which eventually reached number 31 in 2012, had reached number 9 in 2002 when the broken 2001 – 2002 Fifth Review Conference resumed. All of this work was funded through a series of grants from non-Government charitable sources.

In addition, Graham Pearson obtained a number of grants in order to organise several NATO Advanced Research Workshops (ARWs) and Advanced Studies Institutes (ASIs). These involved diplomats and scientific experts who were involved in the negotiations in Geneva. Some examples of the reports from these meetings with the report editors are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Examples of NATO ARWs and ASIs

Verification of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: 32 (NATO Science Partnership Subseries: 1, 32) Hardcover - Illustrated, 31 July 2000
by Malcolm R. Dando (Editor), G.S. Pearson (Editor), Tibor Toth (Editor)

Scientific and Technical Means of Distinguishing Between Natural and Other Outbreaks of Disease

Editors: Malcolm Dando, Graham Pearson, Bohumir Kriz
Part of the book series: NATO Science Partnership Subseries: 1 (ASDT, volume 35)

Maximizing the Security and Development Benefits from the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Editors: Malcolm R. Dando, Cyril Klement, Marian Negut, G.S. Pearson
Copyright: 2002

The Role of Biotechnology in Countering BTW Agents

Editors: Alexander Kelle, Malcolm R. Dando, Kathryn Nixdorff
Copyright: 2001

During this period, Professor Pearson also published a study of UNSCOM – *The UNSCOM Saga: Chemical and Biological Non-Proliferation* and started his Report from Geneva on the meetings of Experts and States Parties for the Harvard/Sussex *CBW Conventions Bulletin*.

4. The Bradford University Project on Strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention: Analysis

There is obviously far too much detailed material produced within this project for a full analysis of it to be sensibly made in the space available here. However, it is possible to ask whether the Protocol might have begun the process of strengthening the Convention and whether it was in fact based on the CWC experience. We can attempt to do that by examining two of the *Evaluation Papers* published in 2001 just before and after the US rejected the Chairman's Composite Protocol text.

Evaluation Paper 21 of July 2001 was titled *The Composite Protocol Text: An Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits to States Parties*.¹² In paragraph 5, the Paper sets out how the evaluation is to be carried out:

“This Evaluation Paper examines the value of the Protocol by making comparisons, first between the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) with its Protocol regime and the BTWC alone, and then between the BTWC with its Protocol regime and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) regime, given that both Conventions overlap — and rightly so — in the areas of toxins, bioregulators and peptides...”

We will deal with these two comparisons separately here, but the Paper makes an important point before turning to the comparisons, pointing out that the aim was never to produce a ‘verification’ Protocol but rather to find ways on increasing confidence in compliance amongst States Parties that the:¹³

“...whole thrust has been to focus on compliance — to increase transparency as well as the quantity and quality of information about activities and facilities

within States Parties of particular relevance to the Convention. Over time this transparency will help to build confidence between States Parties that they are in compliance with the Convention...”

This point is very important, particularly with regard to the rejection of the Composite Protocol — or of any further development of it — by the United States.

The comparison of the BTWC and Protocol with the BTWC is summarised in Tables 1 and 2 within the Paper and it is concluded that the Protocol would bring significant benefits to the States Parties and over time would increase confidence in compliance:¹⁴ Furthermore, it continues to note that international cooperation and assistance would also be improved:

“...The international cooperation and assistance provisions address a genuine need to counter outbreaks of disease and through improvements in infrastructure in areas such as biosafety and good manufacturing practice to meet internationally accepted standards bring benefits for health and safety as well as for prosperity. The Protocol as a whole thus brings improved health, safety, security and prosperity to all States Parties.”

Of course, it may be noted in relation to the ongoing discussions of strengthening the Convention after the 9th Review Conference in 2022, that the protocol had detailed provisions for International Cooperation and a Cooperation Committee. See Table 1 on page 5 (row 10) in the Evaluation Paper.

Turning then to the comparison with the CWC, the Paper begins by emphasising again that there is a critical overlap between the BTWC and the CWC with regard to the so-called mid-spectrum agents like toxins and bioregulators.¹⁵ Therefore, the Paper argues that it is not surprising that the:

“... BTWC Protocol regime has adopted some concepts where appropriate from the CWC regime. It is not, however, just a simple copy which ignores the fundamental differences between the two areas. The Protocol is, however, much more elaborated than the CWC and has been finely tailored to address the fundamental difference in the nature of biological agents as well as to capture the facilities of greatest relevance to the Convention...”

Indeed, the text continues:

“... If we ignore the chemical weapon and chemical weapon production facility elements of the CWC, then the basic architecture of the BTWC Protocol regime and the CWC regime is the **same**. The qualitative differences between the regimes are in the detail: the BTWC Protocol regime has built on the confidence-building measures agreed by all the States Parties at the Second Review Conference in 1986 and extended at the Third Review Conference in 1991. In respect of the monitoring of dual-purpose materials and facilities, the two regimes are very comparable, with the Protocol regime imposing a less onerous but more focussed burden in respect of declarations and visits whilst the international cooperation provisions are much more extensive than those of the CWC.” (The bold items in this and succeeding quotations are in the original text).

With Footnote 7 in the quotation above explaining further that:

“⁷ This difference results because the CWC was negotiated when a number of States had admitted to having stockpiles of chemical weapons and to having chemical weapon production facilities which are required to be destroyed under the CWC. In contrast, when the BTWC was negotiated in the early 1970s the US had already announced that it would destroy its stockpile and no other State admitted

to having stockpiles of biological weapons or to biological weapon production facilities. Consequently, Article II of the Convention makes no mention of production facilities.... As the BTWC has been in force since 1975 and no State has admitted to a stockpile of biological weapons there are no provisions in the Protocol requiring the declaration and destruction under verification of such weapons.”

Table 3 of the *Evaluation Paper* then sets out a detailed comparison of the BTWC with the Protocol and the CWC.

On this basis, the Paper concludes that with regard to the comparison with the CWC:¹⁶

“The aim of the [BTWC] Protocol throughout has been to create a package of measures that will increase transparency and build confidence between States Parties that they are in compliance with the Convention. *It is a **not** a verification Protocol in the narrow sense – it is misleading to suggest otherwise. The heart of the Protocol is thus made up of mandatory declarations, the declaration follow-up procedures and the provisions for investigations.* A balance has necessarily to be struck as to which facilities are to be declared: the Protocol declaration triggers embrace a wide range of the facilities and activities of most relevance to the Convention:

- a. Biodefence programmes and facilities.
- b. Maximum biological containment facilities
- c. High biological containment facilities engaged in certain specified production or genetic modification activities
- d. Plant pathogen containment facilities over a particular floor area
- e. Work with listed agents and/or toxins of a particular character: production above

a certain capacity; genetic modification activities; and intentional aerosolization.

- f. Production facilities in excess of certain capacities or producing human or animal vaccines.” (Emphasis added).

And therefore, that:

“Those who argue that the CWC regime is not relevant to considerations of the BTWC Protocol regime are ignoring the facts that **both** regimes address dual-use materials and technology, **both** have general purpose criteria in the basic prohibition which ensures that past, present and future agents are all covered and **both** cover the prohibition of toxins, bioregulators and peptides. *It is evident that the Protocol regime has been developed from that of the CWC and had been tailored to address the particular nature of biological agents and toxins.*” (Emphasis added)

It was therefore unlikely that members of the Project would be in agreement with the US rejection of the Protocol.

That, indeed, proved to be a correct appreciation. *Evaluation Paper 22* of August 2001 titled *The US Rejection of the Composite Protocol: A Huge Mistake Based on Illogical Assessment* ran to 48 pages of text and tables that consider the Statements made by Ambassador Mahley and other US official statements in detail.¹⁷ We concentrate here on the question of whether the approach taken by the CWC of mandatory declarations, confirmatory visits and potential investigations were what the negotiations were intended to achieve and were achieved, but rejected by the US. The *Evaluation Paper* states that:¹⁸

“The US statement continues to say that **‘Our overarching concern is the inherent difficulty of crafting a mechanism suitable to address the unique biological weapons threat’** and

that the traditional approach that has worked well for many other types of weapons **‘is not a workable structure for biological weapons’**. If this is indeed the case, one has to ask why the United States agreed to the conclusions of the Special Conference in 1994 at which Don Mahley said in regard to the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group that:

“First, the commitments contained in the Convention, especially the obligations in Article I, were fully valid and must remain unchanged. The United States would strongly oppose any effort to amend the Convention, but it fully supported the preparation of a protocol containing a regime to strengthen it. Secondly, ...all measures included in the protocol should be mandatory and legally binding. The measures set forth in the protocol should help strengthen the Convention by establishing an official benchmark for identifying discrepancies or ambiguities pertaining to facilities or activities and for seeking clarification, providing a mechanism for pursuing specific activities of concern and allowing for direct diplomatic engagement to resolve compliance concerns. Thirdly, the ad hoc committee should focus on developing a legally binding regime based on the measures proposed by VEREX Group and the conclusions as reported to the States parties. Fourthly, the selection process should consider both off-site measures, **such as mandatory declarations**, and on-site measures, **such as facility visits**, providing a solid foundation for the verification regime.”

The *Evaluation Paper* reiterates this point in its paragraph 24 as follows:

“Moreover, the United States was one of the 29 States who joined in July 1998, a year after the Ad Hoc Group had transitioned to negotiation of the rolling text of the Protocol, in submitting Working Paper No. 296 to the Ad Hoc Group. This stated that ‘the above States Parties

consider that the measures to strengthen compliance should include, inter alia, the following elements, and that discussion on these should focus on ensuring their efficiency, practicality and cost effectiveness. They include:

- Declarations of a range of facilities and activities of potential relevance under the Convention, inter alia, to enhance transparency;
- Provisions for visits to facilities in order to promote accurate and complete declarations and thus further enhance transparency and confidence;
- Provision for rapid and effective investigations into concerns over non-compliance, including both facility and field investigations; and
- A cost-effective and independent organization, including a small permanent staff, capable of implementing the Protocol effectively.’

The Working Paper [No. 296] concludes by stating that “They [the above States Parties] call upon the Ad Hoc Group as a whole to demonstrate leadership by intensifying its efforts towards the successful and early adoption of a legally-binding Protocol that will address the global threat posed by biological and toxin weapons.’ The language in the US statement of 25 July 2001 is totally illogical when considered against this background.”

The significance of the CWC with regard to the development of the Protocol is emphasised again in a passage on the utility of on-site activities. Paragraph 34 of the Evaluation Paper begins:¹⁹

“The statement goes on to say that when the US **examined the prospects of the most intrusive and extensive on-site activities physically possible ... we discovered that the results of such intrusiveness would still not provide**

useful, accurate or complete information. This is hardly surprising as such a conclusion applies equally to the completeness of information under any on-site inspection under any arms control regime. It is, however, a sweeping conclusion that is misleading in its assertion that such on-site activities would not provide **useful** information. It is evident from past experience that on-site activities have provided and do provide useful information – concerns can either be resolved or reinforced. It is also misleading to suggest that on-site activities need to be considered in isolation. They form a key element of an integrated regime comprising mandatory declarations, follow-up procedures and investigations which in the composite Protocol text provide a structured and elaborated framework for the provision of accurate information about the activities and facilities of the most relevance to the Convention....”

And it proceeds to illustrate the point as follows:

“...This brings immense benefits as was noted by Dr John Gee, Deputy Director General of the OPCW, addressing the success of the declarations made under the CWC, who said that:

What is significant is the fact that declarations have been made and the key parts of each State Party’s declarations are available to all other States Parties....This has been a considerable confidence-building measure.... This process has answered a lot of questions that were out there prior to entry into force.... all the other countries had to go on were press reports and intelligence estimates and so forth. The whole process of having declarations available to other States Parties has been a great success and a very substantial confidence-building measure.

If the situation with the Protocol in place is compared to the alternative of simply

continuing with the Convention, it is impossible to see how a conclusion — as has been stated recently in evidence to a Congressional Subcommittee — can be reached that ‘a Protocol would not improve our ability to effectively verify compliance with the BWC either in terms of certifying that a country is in compliance with, or in violation of, its obligation’. Without the Protocol all that any country has to go on are press reports, intelligence estimates and so on; intelligence estimates have necessarily to be worst case assumptions and may well give undue credence to rumour and innuendo or simply fail to recognise perfectly legal reasons for an activity...”

Thus, the Analysis section of the Evaluation Paper states that:²⁰

“The United States statement of 25 July 2001 makes a number of assertions and exhortations which do not stand up to detailed analysis. It is evident that the United States in rejecting the Protocol is making a **huge mistake** — and more to the point — one that is based on illogical assessments. *It is primarily evaluating the Protocol against some national standards — and not against the Protocol mandate that the United States not only agreed to but was instrumental in drawing up having proposed many of the elements...*” (Emphasis added)

So, there is no doubt, on this assessment, that the BTWC Protocol was based on the traditional arms control standard mode of structure and function embodied in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

5. The Future?

As the originator of the idea of a web of deterrence²¹ that later expanded into the concept of a web of prevention, Graham Pearson always saw the possible Protocol as an element in the overall layered system of

preventing the hostile misuse of the chemical and biological sciences. Therefore, in order to address the new agenda in Geneva after the failure of the Protocol negotiations, the project he organised at Bradford continued to provide *Briefing Papers* in a Second Series of 19 papers from January 2003 to November 2005 and in a Third Series of 11 papers from July 2012 to July 2015. Additionally, as mentioned previously, a new series of 31 *Review Conference Papers* ran from 2001 to March 2012 and large *Key Points Guides* were produced for the 6th and 7th Review Conferences.²²

Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that twenty years have been lost because a central element of the Web of Prevention — the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention — remains weak. Moreover, now that the phase of destruction of chemical weapons has been concluded, it is clear that the CWC and the BTWC face the same problem of preventing the re-emergence of these weapon systems and that they are inevitably joined in the need to cover toxin and bio-regulatory weapons.²³

It has to be acknowledged that the revolution in the Life and associated Sciences has continued since the time of the Protocol negotiations, but the revolution was already underway at that time.²⁴ It seems that the critical question remains much the same as it was during the 1990s, and that is, whether States Parties can have confidence that other States do not have offensive biological weapons programmes. In its 2024 compliance report the United States defined such programmes as follows:²⁵

“The United States’ definition of a state biological warfare program is a leadership-approved effort intended to acquire, develop, modify, produce, or retain biological warfare agents for use or potential use as a weapon. A biological

warfare program would probably include one or more of the following:

- *Researching, acquiring, developing, modifying, producing, retaining, or testing biological weapons (BW) agents and/or BW agent dispersal devices for use as a weapon;*
- Facilities producing or intended to produce BW agents and/or BW agent dispersal devices for use as a weapon;
- Training, doctrine, or plans for use of BW agents as a weapon; and,
- Use or attempted use of a BW agent as a weapon.” (Emphases added).

Although at present, rapid strengthening of the BTWC is unlikely; when that becomes possible it seems to us that, amongst other things, it is going to require consideration of the standard core mechanism of declarations, visits and inspections along the lines of the CWC, if it is to be effective.²⁶

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¹ J. Revill and M.G. Maceda, (Eds.) *Reflections on Review Conferences: The Non-Proliferation Treaty, The Biological Weapons Convention and The Chemical Weapons Convention*. UNIDIR, Geneva, 2023, p. 14.

² See, for example, N. Cropper, *et al Creating a Verification Protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention: A Modular-Incremental Approach*, Next Generation for Biosecurity Competition. Nuclear Threat Initiative, Washington, D.C. 2022.

³ Special Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, Final Report, BWC/SPCONF/1, United Nations, Geneva, 19 – 30 September, 1994, p. 10.

⁴ Donald Mahley *Biological Weapons Convention: Statement by the United States to the Ad Hoc Group of Biological Weapons States Parties*, Geneva, Switzerland, 25 July 2001, State Department Archive at USA.gov. p. 2.

⁵ D. J. MacEachin, “Routine and Challenge: Two Pillars of Verification”, *The CBW Conventions Bulletin*, 39 (1 – 3), 1998.

⁶ Donald A. Mahley “A Personal Assessment of the BWC Protocol Negotiations”, *The CBW Conventions Bulletin*, 86(1 – 5), 2010, p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ See, for example, J. Littlewood, *The Biological Weapons Convention; A Failed Revolution*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005, pp. 209 -212.

⁹ “Statement delivered by Bonnie Jenkins, United States Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security”, Ninth Biological Weapons Review Conference, Geneva, Switzerland, 29 November 2022, p. 2.

¹⁰ J.B. Tucker, “Verification Provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and their Relevance to the Biological Weapons Convention”, in G.S. Pearson *et al* (Eds.), *Biological Weapons Proliferation: Reasons for Concern, Courses of Action*, Stimson Center, Washington, D.C. pp.2=76-104, 100 at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10897.14>.

¹¹ The Papers are available on the Web of Prevention Clearing House website at <https://www.opbw.org/sbtwc/sbtwc/html>.

¹² See the full text of Evaluation Paper 21 on the Web of Prevention Website. This quotation is from page 2.

¹³ Paragraph 10, p. 4.

¹⁴ Paragraphs 12 to 14, pp.3 – 5.

¹⁵ Paragraphs 15 to 17, pp. 6 to 8.

¹⁶ Paragraphs 25 and 27, pp. 14 and 15.

¹⁷ The full text is available on the Web of Prevention Clearing House website as in endnote 11 above.

¹⁸ Paragraph 22, pp. 12 and 13.

- ¹⁹ Paragraph 34, pp. 17 and 18.
- ²⁰ Paragraph 80, p. 39.
- ²¹ Graham S. Pearson, “The Vital Importance of the Web of Deterrence”, Proceedings of Sixth International Symposium on “Protection against Chemical and Biological Warfare Agents”, Stockholm, 10 - 15 May 1998, pp. 23-31; Graham S. Pearson, “Prospects for Chemical and Biological Arms Control: The Web of Deterrence”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1993, pp.145 - 162.
- ²² The full texts of both of these documents are available on the Web of Prevention website.
- ²³ M. Crowley and M.R. Dando, *Toxin and Bioregulator Weapons: Preventing the Misuse of the Chemical and Life Sciences*, Palgrave Macmillan, Springer Nature, Cham, Switzerland, 2022.
- ²⁴ See for example *Novel Toxins and Bioregulators: The Emerging Scientific and Technological Issues Related to the Verification of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention*, External Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, Canada, September 1991. This extensive analysis was circulated to States Parties at the Third Review Conference in September 1991.
- ²⁵ *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, Department of State, Washington, D.C. April 2024, p.22 .
- ²⁶ D. J. MacEachin, no. 5.

Countering Proliferation Financing: An Appraisal

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Summary

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is ideally placed to strengthen the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) against proliferation financing. This article provides a brief overview of this endeavour and highlights certain key initiatives of the FATF in strengthening the regime against proliferation financing.

Introduction

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as a threat has remained at the forefront of international security concerns. In 2004, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1540. “The Security Council decided that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, in particular for terrorist purposes.”¹ The Resolution focussed on several aspects of WMD proliferation, while finding a brief mention in the provisions of paragraphs 2 and 3(d). Given the complexity of the challenge, a body of experts was required to follow up with the mandate, capacity, and training to support this requirement of the United Nations.

FATF Initiatives

The role of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in countering money laundering and terrorist finance was seen as an ideal option to evaluate the threat emanating from proliferation finance. Accordingly, in 2007 the FATF began assessing the threat from proliferation finance and its potential linkages with terrorist financing.² This was undertaken through a typology report that “develops an understanding of the issues surrounding proliferation financing” with suggested measures to counter it. This implied three key aspects of the challenge at hand – identification of the threat; assessment of existing effectiveness of measures being undertaken by member countries; and finally, suggesting measures to combat it.³

The typology report in 2008 noted certain key weaknesses amongst member states. These included:

- Inadequate obligations amongst financial institutions to detect proliferation financing.
- Incomplete listing of controlled goods, including dual-use goods by jurisdictions.
- Legislations did not have provisions to criminalise proliferation financing activities.
- Even as certain jurisdictions had a framework in place, some did not have the resources to implement it, rendering themselves open to vulnerabilities and threats.

The methodology for evaluating the risks and putting in place measures to fight proliferation financing threats follows a pattern that emerges from existing case studies on the subject. The basis of any evaluation emerges from a comprehensive risk assessment of existing threats and vulnerabilities. This is followed by a seamless information and intelligence-sharing mechanism to allow agencies to take advanced measures to mitigate the threat. Past instances suggest that enforcement can only be undertaken when supported by legislative measures that allow actions like seeking verification of goods being transferred. The next step involves verification with the end-user to ensure utility as intended to offset the potential for misuse, including information regarding the change in end-user requirements.

Over time, case studies and typology reports suggested that vulnerability to proliferation financing existed beyond State institutions and formal financial institutions like banks. It was realised that the fight against potential

threats of proliferation financing also needed to focus on non-financial institutions and private entities that could be involved, especially in the case of dual-use technologies.

The FATF has since gradually enlarged the scope of accountability beyond traditional financial institutions. This now includes Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions (DNFBPs) and Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs). DNFBPs are institutions and professions that may not be typical financial institutions like banks, but nonetheless, are susceptible to exploitation and abuse. This includes professions like property dealing and gem and jewellery trade. Similarly, virtual assets, their holding, exchange and handling have grown rapidly. Despite this, its regulation and legal control remain inadequate. Seventy-five per cent of jurisdictions continue to remain non-compliant or only partially compliant with Recommendation 15 of the FATF, that deals with virtual assets as of April 2023.⁴ Incidentally, India was rated as Largely Compliant with Recommendation 15 during its 2024 Mutual Evaluation which was released to the public on 19 September 2024. However, international under-regulation of the sector can lead to the potential exploitation by terrorists and those involved in the financing of the proliferation of WMD.

The FATF Best Practices Paper identifies important domestic agencies involved in information sharing, to create the requisite synergies to fight against the financing of WMD proliferation. This includes the following:⁵

- Export control and customs/ border control agencies.
- Identifying, analysing, disseminating and sharing intelligence on proliferation activities.

- Reinforcing the role of Financial Intelligence Units to utilise suspicious transaction reports for identifying suspected individuals and organisations for their proliferation activities.
- Empowering law enforcement agencies to prosecute violators for export control violations through provisions in existing laws and regulations.
- Role of supervisors and authorities in identifying and reporting individual linkages with countries involved in proliferation activities.
- Raising awareness among trade promotion agencies regarding dealing with countries identified as a proliferation risk.
- Involving government departments with information exchange on proliferation risks to enable them to enforce existing guidance and UNSC regimes.
- Individuals and entities involved in enforcing international mandates against proliferation finance should receive all information to identify vulnerabilities and take action against concerned suspects.

Conclusion

FATF guidance suggests close linkages between corruption, money laundering and terrorist finance. The channels used by criminal gangs are equally susceptible to exploitation by terrorist organisations and groups involved in proliferation activities. This reinforces the importance of better awareness of proliferation financing threats through information-sharing mechanisms and empowering agencies to intervene to disrupt illicit financing channels.

Endnotes:

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- ⁵ “Best Practices Paper – Sharing Among Domestic Competent Authorities Related to The Financing of Proliferation”, FATF, February 2012 at <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/guidance/BPP%20on%20Recommendation%20%20Sharing%20among%20domestic%20competent%20authorities%20re%20financing%20of%20proliferation.pdf.coredownload.inline.pdf> (Accessed on 18 October 2024).

Destruction of Chemical Weapons Facilities in Syria

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Summary

The civil war in Syria exposed significant failures in global non-proliferation mechanisms. Despite Syria's 2013 accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, chemical weapons were used repeatedly with limited accountability. Political deadlocks in the UN and limitations in the OPCW mandate have set a dangerous precedent for future conflicts and consequences for the use of chemical weapons. Following Bashar al-Assad's overthrow, Israeli airstrikes targeted suspected chemical weapons facilities to prevent their proliferation to extremist groups. While arguments can be made for violating the sovereignty of Syria, the destruction of these weapon stockpiles may have been for the best. This article highlights the erosion of trust in international arms control frameworks and the challenges of preventing chemical weapons proliferation in conflict zones.

Background

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011 during the Arab Spring has culminated in December 2024 with the rapid overthrow of President Assad's regime. Rebel forces have captured Damascus and completed an 11-day push to topple the government, while the former dictator of the country fled to Russia. Following Assad's fall, Israeli forces launched pre-emptive airstrikes on suspected chemical weapons facilities to prevent their proliferation to extremist groups. These strikes may be flouting the sovereignty of Syria but may have been for the good in the long run.

The Syrian Civil War exposed the limitations of international mechanisms like the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the UN Security Council, where political deadlocks and enforcement failures undermined accountability, leading to erosion of trust in global non-proliferation norms. Throughout the conflict, the Assad regime has faced numerous accusations of deploying chemical weapons against civilian populations. Allegedly upwards of 300 incidents of chemical weapons use have taken place but the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has only been able to confirm 17 of these instances after thorough investigations¹.

Notably, the 2013 sarin gas attack near Damascus resulted in over 1,400 deaths, prompting international outrage. Despite Syria's accession to the CWC in 2013 and commitments to dismantle its chemical arsenal, reports persisted of chemical attacks, including the 2018 chlorine gas attack in Douma, which killed at least 43 civilians.

The OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) conducted thorough investigations, attributing several attacks to the Syrian Arab Air Force. For instance, the IIT's third report, released in January 2023, concluded that the Syrian Air Force was responsible for the 2018 Douma chemical attack ².

In the wake of Assad's downfall, concerns have escalated regarding the security of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. Fears that these weapons could fall into the hands of extremist groups, prompted pre-emptive action by Israeli Defense Forces which targeted suspected chemical weapons facilities while conducting roughly 300 airstrikes across the country.

In order to understand the impact of these events, it is important to highlight the context within which these events are taking place.

The Arab Spring and the Onset of the Syrian Civil War

In 2011, a wave of pro-democracy uprisings, known as the Arab Spring, swept across the Middle East and North Africa. In Syria, this movement manifested as peaceful protests demanding political reforms and greater freedoms under President Bashar al-Assad. The government's harsh crackdown on demonstrators, involving arrests, torture, and lethal force, escalated tensions, leading to the militarization of the opposition and the eruption of a full-scale civil war³.

The roots of Syria's internal conflicts can be traced back to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, a secret accord between Britain and France that divided the Ottoman Empire's Arab territories into spheres of influence. This arbitrary delineation methodically and intentionally disregarded ethnic, religious, and tribal boundaries, amalgamating diverse groups within newly formed national borders that were meant to be inherently unstable.

In Syria, this led to a complex tapestry of Sunni Arabs, Alawites, Christians, Kurds, and other minorities co-existing under a single national identity that was thrust upon them by external forces. The lack of cohesive national unity, compounded by historical grievances and power imbalances, sowed seeds of discord that would later surface during periods of instability⁴.

Broadly speaking, these fractured loyalties have given rise to multiple entities participating in the Syrian Civil War. Initially the Syrian Government Forces comprised Loyalists to President Assad, predominantly from the Alawite minority trying to retain power, were the strongest faction. However, as the movement grew, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was formed. It was initially a coalition of defected military personnel and civilians advocating for democratic reforms. However once the conflict grew increasingly militant, Islamist Groups joined the fray including Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda's affiliate) and later ISIS, seeking to establish an Islamic state⁵.

In the Northeastern part of the country bordering Turkey, a Kurdish independence movement grew, primarily the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) or People's Defence Units, which sought autonomy in Kurdish-majority regions. Apart from these entities, countries like Russia, Iran, Turkey, US, France, UK and Israel have been backing different groups at various points of the decade-long war making the already murky conflict utterly chaotic.

Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Civil War

The Syrian civil war progressed along traditional lines, like other wars in the Middle East for two years after the conflict began. However, in March 2013, accusations began flying about the use of Sarin gas in Khan al-Assal city near Aleppo resulting in numerous

fatalities. This was only the first of many alleged instances where chemical weapons were said to have been used in the war. According to the Global Public Policy Institute, at least 336 chemical weapons attacks have taken place. Amongst these, blame for 98 per cent of them has been laid at the feet of the Assad regime, while ISIS has been blamed for the rest ¹.

The body responsible for investigating the use of chemical weapons is the OPCW, which has only been able to confirm 17 instances of chemical weapons use by the Syrian government. This has been due to bureaucratic red tape by multiple interested parties. As a result, the truth about the scale of chemical weapons use would be difficult to uncover when the OPCW was able to investigate only 77 of the 336 alleged instances⁶. However, there are some instances which stand out for the scale of the damage they inflicted on civilian populations.

- Khan al-Assal (19 March 2013): This was the first instance of chemical weapons use, and both the Syrian government and opposition accused each other of using sarin gas killing 26 people. The UN conducted investigations but faced challenges in attributing responsibility.

- Ghouta (21 August 2013): A large-scale sarin attack in the Damascus suburbs killed hundreds, with estimates ranging from 281 to 1,729 deaths. The UN confirmed the use of sarin but again, did not assign blame. Subsequent analyses and reports suggested the Syrian government's involvement.

- Khan Shaykhun (4 April 2017): A sarin attack in Idlib province resulted in over 80 deaths. The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism attributed the attack to the Syrian government.

- Ltamenah (24, 25, and 30 March 2017): The OPCW's Investigation and

Identification Team (IIT) reported that the Syrian Air Force used sarin and chlorine in attacks on this town. While specific casualty numbers are not well documented, the use of chemical weapons was confirmed.

- Douma (7 April 2018): A chlorine gas attack killed at least 43 civilians. The OPCW's IIT concluded that the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible.

While both Sarin and Chlorine gas were confirmed to have been used, other chemical weapons like Mustard gas, Phosgene and unspecified nerve agents have also been reported. These violations of international law have had devastating humanitarian impacts and have significantly deteriorated confidence in international bodies to uphold the values they claim to protect ⁷.

Attacks on Chemical Weapons Facilities

In late November 2024, the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group took control of Aleppo and started a series of domino events. With the capture of Aleppo, the HTS and allied forces gained momentum and took the cities of Hama and Homs one after the other despite resistance from Russia and Iran. By 8 December, the Syrian Army withdrew from Damascus and fled Bashar al-Assad to Russia while Damascus was taken over by the opposition forces ⁷.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Israeli forces physically moved troops across the border and began conducting targeted airstrikes on several key military installations in Syria. While these attacks were aimed primarily for dismantling the Air Force assets of the Syrian military, they also hit multiple sites that were suspected of housing chemical weapons. According to the IDF, these operations aimed to prevent the proliferation of advanced weaponry, including chemical

weapons, to hostile entities amid the ensuing power vacuum ⁸.

Syria's chemical weapons programme has been a focal point of international concern, particularly following the 2013 sarin gas attack in Douma. Despite Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in October of that year, and subsequent declarations of disarmament, reports have persisted of undeclared stockpiles and continued production chemical weapons. The targeted facilities, including the Barzeh Research Center, have been previously linked to chemical weapons development. The OPCW has conducted multiple inspections at these sites with no significant results ^{9,10}. The Israeli airstrikes are a part of a broader strategy to prevent the proliferation of Syria's advanced weaponry, including chemical weapons, in the unstable post-Assad landscape.

Reactions to the Airstrikes

The primary motivations for the Israeli bombings were a form of pre-emptive offensive non-proliferation. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar stated that the strikes aimed to prevent such weapons from being acquired by adversaries, emphasizing that Israel's sole interest was the security of its citizens. The land offensive sought to create a "sterile defensive area" in southern Syria to enhance its border security ¹¹.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz announced plans to establish this zone following the regime's collapse, with Israeli ground forces moving into a demilitarized buffer zone from the Golan Heights and taking over abandoned Syrian military positions. Furthermore, by targeting and destroying Syria's naval and air force assets alongside strategic weapons stockpiles, Israel can mitigate immediate security threats and prevent the resurgence of hostile military capabilities in the region ¹².

The international community's response to Israel's actions was mixed. The UN Security Council convened an emergency meeting to address the situation. Members expressed a commitment to preserving Syria's sovereignty and emphasized the importance of providing humanitarian aid to the affected population. Several Arab countries have condemned Israel's incursions, accusing it of violating Syria's territorial integrity. They called for respect for Syria's sovereignty and urged Israel to withdraw its forces.

The US has maintained its dogmatic support for Israel's right to self-defence. Secretary of State Antony Blinken acknowledged direct contact with the Syrian rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), emphasizing the importance of responsible governance and the security of chemical weapons stockpiles ¹³.

The OPCW reiterated its commitment to ensuring the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons. The organization emphasized the paramount importance of securing all chemical weapons-related materials and facilities in the country.

Ahmad al-Sharaa, the de facto leader of Syria and head of HTS, criticized Israel's actions, stating that Syria was not interested in engaging in new conflicts despite the attacks. He emphasized the need for reconstruction and stability, advocating for diplomatic solutions and warning against military escalations.

Strategic Insights

With the conclusion of the civil war in Syria, an interesting chemical weapons case study presents itself with respect to their use and the consequences of such actions. The war highlights how various actors—State and non-State—failed to uphold the standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

and interfered with the effective functioning of the OPCW.

While the Syrian government became a party to the CWC only after October 2013 Ghouta Sarin attack, its declarations of chemical weapon stockpiles have been misleading. Furthermore, the targets of these chemical weapons have often been civilian rather than military areas. Apart from abject disregard for its own civilians, the Syrian government also repeatedly faced accusations of delaying and obstructing the OPCW investigative teams.

These efforts were aided by the backing of Russia which repeatedly used its veto power in the UN Security Council to block Resolutions aimed at holding Syria accountable for chemical weapons use. On the other hand, Western powers like the United States, the United Kingdom and France who condemned the use of chemical weapons, also faced criticism for inconsistent enforcement of norms.

This international deadlock in the UN allowed for proliferation of chemical weapons to such an extent that non-State actors like ISIS were not only able to gain access, but also able to use chemical weapons. Unlike nation-states, non-State actors are not party to the CWC and create an extremely dangerous precedent with no legal recourse. The Syrian crisis exposed the limitations of existing treaties like the CWC in addressing violations by State actors, particularly when international enforcement mechanisms are undermined by political interests.

The OPCW as an independent international investigative agency did not have the mandate to assign blame till 2018. The creation of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) was a step forward, but the findings were often faced with political opposition. The OPCW has also faced persistent accusations of bias that have

undermined its credibility that even a Nobel Peace Prize was not able to preserve.

The Syrian civil war is a testament to an erosion of the taboo regarding chemical weapons use. The inability to decisively hold perpetrators accountable undermines the deterrent value of the CWC and sets a dangerous precedent for all future conflicts. The ideological deadlock that paralyses the UN Security Council via the veto power basically ensures that regardless of what the OPCW does, the enforcement of the CWC is not as stringent as it should be. Political interference, lack of consensus, and accusations of bias have tarnished the reputation of the OPCW in a way that the organization's ability to respond effectively to future chemical weapons crises may be hampered. It also exposes crucial weaknesses in international mechanisms for monitoring and verification in active conflict zones.

The pre-emptive bombing by Israel does violate the sovereignty of Syria, amongst a multitude of other issues. However, in the context of non-proliferation of chemical weapons, the destruction of these facilities may have prevented a long-drawn-out political deadlock that risked the exposure of these stockpiles to non-State actors. Destroying the bottle before the genie can be let out may have been in the best interests of not only Israel's national security but also the goal of non-proliferation of chemical weapons.

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Strengthening the Chemical Weapons Convention through Improved Civil Society Participation

Ms. Aayushi Sharma

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Summary

This article examines how improved civil society participation within the OPCW can be instrumental in strengthening the principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention, especially the challenge of non-proliferation and prevention of use. Different recommendations for building strong partnerships with civil society organisations and streamlining dialogue with States Parties are explored.

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is one of the most successful legal instruments within the international disarmament regime. The success of this Convention was solidified when the last declared stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world were destroyed by the United States in 2023.¹ The destruction of the declared stockpiles is a major milestone in the implementation of the Convention; however, significant challenges still remain, particularly with regard to non-compliance of certain States Parties, verification mechanisms, the looming threat of proliferation in a world mired in long-standing conflicts and the persistent ambiguity of the impact of emerging technologies.

These challenges also create a set of new opportunities for strengthening the implementation of the Convention. One of the many ways the Convention and States Parties can deal with the emerging challenges is through the expansion of its sphere of engagement in the larger civil society. The civil society organisations working within the domain of disarmament bring unparalleled expertise through research and grassroots engagement, which can be a productive asset for the implementation of the provisions of this Convention.

Trends in civil society participation within the OPCW

It is essential first to define what constitutes civil society, to effectively argue in favour of its expanded engagement within the Convention. Civil society organisations encompass a broad range of groups, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic and research institutions, as well

as experts in fields such as science and medicine. These diverse sectors play a critical role in shaping policy and discourse, making their involvement indispensable to informed decision-making processes.

In this context, the scientific, industry and academic expertise have been utilised within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) through their Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), the Chemical Industry Coordination Group and the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach.² The OPCW, in its work on implementing the principles of the Convention, has been taking into account the developments in science, technology, and industry through its various advisory boards. However, the representation of environmental and victims' rights organisations has not yet been institutionalized into advisory boards within the OPCW. When it comes to the discussions among States Parties, as per the decisions taken during the third Review Conference (RC-3), non-governmental organisations were considered separate from the chemical industry and scientific actors.

It is indeed an immense task to categorize different civil society actors considering their wide range of expertise and areas of influence. There is, however, merit in identifying regional representation of the civil society actors within the OPCW, especially during the Conference of States Parties (CSP). The annual CSPs are a major platform for civil society organisations to directly confer with the States Parties and be able to influence decision-making to advance their respective agendas and the overall implementation of the Treaty. This is why, participation in the CSP is considered important, especially for advocacy groups and organisations. As per the data collated by the OPCW on the regional representation of accredited civil society organisations from

1997 to 2023, the majority of the organisations were located in just six States notably from Western Europe, Asia, and Africa.³ This skewed regional representation of organisations accredited to attend the CSP becomes a challenge when an equal platform to civil society actors worldwide is to be provided. It also has to be noted that the data in question is on accredited CSOs over the years and does not offer detailed information on how many CSOs aspired to attend the CSP, as many of them do not get accreditation for reasons best known to relevant States Parties.

As per the recently held 'Stakeholder Survey' by the Secretariat, responses from the 50 civil society actors were also only concentrated in organisations from Western Europe (40 per cent), Asia (36 per cent), and Africa (24 per cent),⁴ and other regions were starkly under-represented.

Limitations faced by civil societies

Participation in the CSP is the primary form of engagement of civil society actors with the OPCW and hence the CWC. This norm, however, creates a set of limitations for the CSOs – both the accredited and the non-accredited ones. The non-accredited CSOs, often find themselves unable to interact and contribute to the CSP as their participation is blocked due to what can only be termed as political considerations, and the accredited CSOs often concern themselves with the financial costs of physically participating in the CSP. Financial limitation is one of the major reasons for the resulting gap between the CSOs accredited to join the CSP and the ones that actually manage to be present at the CSP.

During the CSPs, the lack of direct facilitated interactions between States Parties and relevant civil society actors is also a concern. Civil society actors can play a significant role

in engaging with government officials or respective national authorities in providing research support and expertise in improving the implementation of the Convention and also influencing the decision-making of State actors. The geographical imbalance, in this case however, can contribute to a lack of equitable opportunities for voicing the concerns of civil society members in different geographical, cultural, and political contexts.

Civil society organisations can be utilised especially in the case of non-compliant States or non-signatory States such as Egypt and South Sudan.⁵ In the past, the OPCW has been engaging more in terms of improving the implementation of the Convention in the African States,⁶ and hence, in this case, direct partnerships with grassroots NGOs and other organisations in the region becomes an indispensable asset.

How can civil society participation be enhanced?

Certain States Parties of the CWC have taken cognizance of the impending lack of civil society participation and steered much-needed negotiations into improving the same. In the recently held 29th CSP, Germany and Costa Rica submitted a Working Paper, highlighting the developments in the informal consultations on the participation of civil society co-facilitated by them. The need to conceptualize civil society as more than just non-governmental organisations was widely noted among the States Parties in these informal consultations. In the ten rounds of informal consultations, pressing issues such as reviewing the accreditation process were put on the table. However, no consensus was achieved. The ‘modalities of communicating objections’ in the case of non-accreditation of CSOs, were also debated. While certain States Parties argued in favour of transparency, others considered that they are under no obligation to provide reasons for rejecting an organisation.

In the ‘OPCW Stakeholder Survey’, civil society actors highlighted improved communication, streamlining education and outreach, and increased intersessional activities as important areas of concern for enhanced engagement.

Indeed, the informal Working Groups among States Parties are a significant starting point for achieving tangible action on the issue of civil society participation. In this case, it becomes all the more important for States in favour of facilitating civil society actors within the OPCW, to be more proactive in partnering with these organisations. Active engagement and dialogue with the CWC Coalition, the NGO arm of the OPCW, is important. Facilitating workshops, outreach sessions, and Roundtable Conferences with civil society actors will expand the space for engagement in intersessional activities, and mitigate their lack of participation in the CSP.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat and interested States Parties can engage with the CWC Coalition in facilitating interactions with organisations from under-represented regions to tackle the grave regional representation imbalance that currently exists. Developing regional chapters of the OPCW in conjunction with the CWC Coalition, will be an important way forward in this regard. Leveraging the opportunities provided by the established voluntary Trust Funds can be one of the ways States can contribute to an action-oriented approach. The mandates of the existing Trust Funds, especially the Fund on the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons, can also be expanded to be utilised for increased coordination with grassroots organisations such as the victims’ rights groups, with a wealth of knowledge and relevant data. Financial limitations of the accredited CSOs, also need to be addressed by the relevant Trust Funds that are established solely to improve civil society participation or alleviate the conditions of the

victims. Mapping and classifying different CSOs and the value they bring to the mandate of the Convention, may be necessary to improve diversified participation.

While the question of the accreditation process may remain stalled due to a lack of consensus among States Parties, efforts for improving direct dialogue with accredited and non-accredited CSOs can be made by the OPCW. Civil society organisations, as expansive as they are in definition, by virtue of their expertise and areas of influence, provide a very strong base for the implementation and universalisation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

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Chloropicrin: The Contested Chemical in Russia-Ukraine War

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Summary

The U.S. Department's sanctioning of over 280 individuals and entities linked to Russia for allegedly using chloropicrin against Ukrainian forces in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War has been challenged by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which deemed the accusations "insufficiently substantiated." Nevertheless, upholding the norms against chemical weapons use, as outlined in the Convention, is crucial for ensuring international peace and security, benefiting both the conflicting parties and the global community.

Introduction

On 1 May 2024, the US Department of State imposed sanctions on more than 280 individuals and entities affiliated with the Russian Federation¹ for using chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Alongside these, the State Department re-imposed restrictions on foreign military financing, US Government lines of credit, and export licenses for defence articles and national security-sensitive items going to Russia. Based on the allegations of the use of chemical weapons, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), in a press release, stated that as per the information available to the Secretariat, the allegations are "insufficiently substantiated".²

Chloropicrin: The Contested Chemical

Chloropicrin is a chemical compound, also known as nitro-chloroform, which is manufactured with sodium hypochlorite and nitro-methane in a chemical reaction. It is used broadly as an antimicrobial agent, insecticide, fungicide as well as herbicide and nematicide. The negative consequences of exposing humans to Chloropicrin are irritation and tear-inducing effects which can be highly toxic and carcinogenic at times. It can further cause, as per the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), severe problems in the respiratory tract and gastrointestinal tract, while causing pulmonary edema (building up of fluid in lungs) leading to death.³ The malicious use of this chemical can be traced back to the First World War when it was used by both,

Allied and Central powers, as a poison gas. At that time, the basic characteristic of Chloropicrin induced soldiers to vomit leading them to remove their masks, thereby inhaling more gaseous agents dispersed in the air. Since Chloropicrin gives an irritating sensation, its use is permitted and is widespread as a riot control agent, domestically. While the chemical compound is permitted to quell protests within a country, its use is strictly prohibited on the battlefield under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Chemical Weapons Convention which augments the Geneva Protocol of 1925 (which bans biological and chemical weapons in international armed conflicts), entered into force in 1997. Under Article I of the Convention, State Parties are prohibited from developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, retaining, transferring or using chemical weapons, under any circumstances. Similarly, under Article III of the Convention, State Parties are obliged to submit timely, accurate, complete declarations related to chemical weapons and chemical weapons facilities on their territory. Moreover, Under the CWC, any chemical is a potential weapon if it can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm to humans or animals through its properties or its actions on life processes.⁴ The ambit of chemical weapons also includes the munitions and devices which can be employed to release toxic chemicals resulting in death or other harms. Based on the above definition, Chloropicrin falls within the ambit of chemical weapons under the CWC.

US Allegations and Sanctions

The United States had alleged that Russia had been involved in the use of the chemical weapon Chloropicrin, in violation of the CWC,

against Ukrainian forces. Additionally, the United States also assessed that Russia had used riot control agents, in breach of the CWC, as a method of warfare during the ongoing war against Ukraine. Drawing on previous allegations made by the West on Russia in the case of Aleksey Navalny and Sergei Skripal, the US State Department asserted that the use of the riot control agent is not an isolated incident, but rather a well-orchestrated attempt to prevent Ukrainian forces from fortifying their positions on the battlefield.

Based on the above allegations, the US Department of State made determination under the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991 (CBW Act) against Russian use of the chemical weapon, Chloropicrin. In coordination with the Department of Treasury, the Department of State sanctioned the Russian Federation's government entities associated with Russia's chemical and biological weapons programmes and other entities contributing to their programme.

Some of the major entities sanctioned include Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (RCB Defence Troops), Scientific Research Institute of Applied Acoustics (FGUP NIIPA), Federal State Budgetary Institution, and the 48th Central Scientific and Research Institute of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (48th TSNII), among others. Russia has categorically denied all the allegations. On 2 May Russian spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that such allegations are unfounded. He further added, "Russia has been and remains committed to its obligations under international law in this area."⁵

OPCW Findings

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) which is a technical secretariat overseeing the CWC's implementation and compliance, have periodically been assessing the status of the use of chemical weapons in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War. Both Russia and Ukraine have accused one another of using chemical weapons multiple times since February 2022.⁶

Although the OPCW has maintained that the situation remains volatile and extremely concerning regarding the possible re-emergence of use of toxic chemicals as weapons, it was categorical in stating that the allegations made by the United States are “insufficiently substantiated”⁷ In a press release, the Organisation noted that all declared chemical weapons stockpiles had been destroyed in July 2023 itself, under strict verification from the OPCW Secretariat.

Conclusion

Both Russia and Ukraine as well as the United States, in the late 1990s, signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention. Since the enforcement of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, the non-use of chemical weapons in international armed conflicts has become an international norm, much similar to the norm of non-proliferation and non-use of nuclear weapons. On 23 May 2023, while addressing the 25th Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation Conference (CMD), the Director General OPCW, Ambassador Fernando Arias, expressed caution amidst the deteriorating international security landscape. He stated that “this is not a moment for self-complacency. We are now facing new risks and threats, that present relevant difficulties

to be addressed. The common task, of maintaining peace and international security, has become more demanding. Armed conflicts are growing, in number and intensity. Geopolitical tensions are on the rise and multilateral institutions and mechanisms are being abrogated, weakened, or ignored.”⁸ In this backdrop, to maintain international peace and security, it is in the interest of the countries involved in the conflict as well as the wider international community, to maintain the norms against the use of chemical weapons, as envisaged under the Convention.

Endnotes:

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Book Review

M. Bhushan, *Silent Weapons Deadly Weapons: Unveiling The Bioweapons Arms Race*, Pathak Publishers and Distributors, 2024, pp. 148.

Ms. Saman Ayesha Kidwai

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This timely book examines the evolving threat landscape of lethal chemical and biological weapons (CBW) and toxins. It places them in the broader context of key global events like the Cold War, debates about their ethical use, treaties, and their exploitative use by State actors since the 20th century. As rightly stated by the author, the use of CBW is a grey-zone tactic, granting those partaking in its weaponisation, plausible deniability in the event of public condemnation upon discovery of its application.

Interestingly, it has frequently been emphasized throughout the book that treaties or initiatives to counter the use of CBW induce a reverse psychological effect on those using them against enemy entities or those deemed collateral damage in pursuit of apparent *scientific* discovery. That is, instead of acting as a deterrent, they encourage their users to cultivate more lethal CBW innovations to inflict greater damage on the human race and erode efforts to regulate the use of chemical and biological agents. This is relevant across the 20th and 21st centuries as some of the most critical milestones, including the Geneva Protocol¹, or international organizations like the United Nations have floundered in restraining CBW's unlawful use.

At the same time, it has been underscored in the book that vested national interests of dominant State actors like the United States, supported by the United Kingdom, have often proved to be the main obstacle in addressing security challenges related to CBW. Such countries, in a bid to seize control of prized information or to fulfill objectives such as ensuring regime change in Cuba or securing a kinetic victory in the Korean War, have thwarted attempts to enforce effective regulatory mechanisms and hold

perpetrators like the Japanese Unit 731² accountable for their war crimes.

Moreover, the rapidly evolving dual-use of chemical and biological agents for civil and military purposes and the challenges that arise in monitoring and regulating their use globally, are a stark reminder of the danger that humankind faces. The author has also provided valuable insights into the multi-fold security challenges faced by India from China, Pakistan, and the terrorist groups that owe their patronage to Islamabad, while exploring India's experiences dealing with CBW threats and those that might arise due to the China-Pakistan nexus in the future.

Nonetheless, loopholes and questions still remain unanswered and that must be addressed. Despite the author mentioning how CBW are ripe for exploitation by State and non-State actors, the latter's involvement has been vaguely referred to. The book would also have been further enriched with references to credible and recorded case studies of using CBW by non-State actors, independently or aided and abetted by State actors. If no such recorded instance is available, it would have served the book and its audience better if this information had been highlighted at the outset.

Additionally, to create a more nuanced understanding of the subject, an understanding of how geopolitics and geo-economics shaped key debates and events related to CBW – including Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) – would have created a more grounded understanding of State behaviour on the international stage. For example, detailing the events in the lead-up to and the foreign policy objectives behind the American invasion of Iraq, carried out under the pretext of dismantling Saddam Hussein's non-existent WMD Programme in 2003,³ would have made this a more accessible read for a much broader audience.

While the book examines the impact of CBW on a State's economy, it is also necessary to consider how a niche war economy has been or could be created in the future with the sale and purchase of associated weapons, materials, or equipment in the near future through the advent of metaverse. This technological development– albeit in its initial stages– as foretold by experts, can potentially create a conducive ecosystem, an amalgamation of augmented and virtual reality, for extremists to congregate and carry out their activities while evading surveillance.⁴

Furthermore, as cryptocurrency is steadily gaining ground, it has become imperative to assess how virtually untraceable digital wallets advanced by platforms like Monero⁵ can be exploited by nefarious actors to procure and make accessible to allies of CBW or their associated components to avoid scrutiny on the world stage. This could be particularly used by actors looking to subvert rival entities' national security and territorial integrity.

Finally, despite the emphasis on cooperation and intelligence-sharing to counter the escalating threat posed by CBW, it is crucial to refrain from attaching overwhelming importance to the subject. Competing national interests, especially amid rising geopolitical contestations and armed conflicts raging worldwide, have prevented tangible and long-term multilateral cooperation from fructifying globally.

Endnotes:

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Chemical and Biological News

If Syrian Chemical Weapons Were Found, the U.S. Army Could Safely Destroy Them

December 25, 2024

Since armed rebels entered Damascus, Syria, and overthrew the reign of President Bashar al-Assad on Dec. 8, U.S. government officials have been waiting to see if any remnants of the former regime's stockpiles of chemical weapons would be found. None are known to have turned up so far. If they did, it is unclear what might happen to them or who would be responsible for disposing of them. But a U.S. military mission to destroy Syrian chemical weapons a decade ago could offer the White House some viable options.

About a year and a half after the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, Maj. Gen. Jay G. Santee found himself in a meeting at the Pentagon discussing a hypothetical problem. At the time, he was the deputy director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, a military office that looks for ways to prevent adversaries from attacking the United States with weapons of mass destruction.

Syria had not officially declared having any chemical weapons. But U.S. intelligence assessments indicated that the Assad government probably had a clandestine cache. The likely candidates were sarin, a nerve agent easily absorbed through the skin that disrupts a victim's central nervous system and leads to muscle spasms, paralysis and respiratory failure; mustard, which causes horrific blistering on skin or inside a victim's lungs if its vapours are inhaled; and chlorine, which was used by insurgents in Iraq against U.S. forces in the mid-2000s. When released in confined spaces, chlorine can lead to suffocation.

If any chemical agents are found in the detritus of the Assad regime, the phone may soon ring at the U.S. Army's Chemical Biological Center at Aberdeen, where the team that carried out the Cape Ray operation has built improved versions of the hydrolysis system used a decade ago. Tim Blades, a civilian employee there who helped design and operate the Cape Ray apparatus at sea, has overseen recent efforts to make even smaller devices that can fit onto a pallet and roll onto a cargo plane for quick transport.

After the 2014 mission, Mr. Blades said in an interview that he and others at Aberdeen tried to convince senior Pentagon leaders their projects needed continued support, because the capabilities they had come up with on short notice might be needed again one day. Otherwise, he said, "every time one of these situations occurs, you're going to be starting all over again."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/25/us/syria-chemical-weapons.html>

US fears exposure of illegal bioweapon projects in Africa – Moscow

December 24, 2024

The US is growing increasingly concerned about joint efforts by Russia and China with African nations to expose Washington's alleged secret military and biological activities on the continent, the Russian Defense Ministry has said. The accusations were laid out in a document presented on Tuesday by Major General Aleksey Rtishchev, the deputy chief of Moscow's Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops.

According to the report, while the US claims its initiatives are aimed at monitoring infectious diseases and providing assistance to African countries, it is actually expanding its military-biological capabilities in violation of the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BTWC).

“The Americans are particularly concerned about the work carried out by Russia and China with the states of the continent to expose the true content of the military-biological programs of the United States in connection with the possible restriction of the Pentagon’s activities in this area,” Rtishchev stated.

He warned Moscow’s *“African partners against cooperation with the United States in the military-biological sphere,”* adding that *“such cooperation turns out to be a loss of national sovereignty in the sphere of biosecurity and worsening of the disease situation.”*

Moscow and Beijing have repeatedly demanded greater transparency from the US and its allies regarding their military biological activities. Earlier this year, the two countries agreed to unite against biological security threats and strengthen the BTWC, a 1972 treaty signed by 109 nations to block the development of bioweapons. Last year, the Russian Defense Ministry drew attention to the transfer of Washington’s dual-purpose biological research projects from Ukraine to Africa under the guise of public health programs.

Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, the former head of the Russian Army’s Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Protection Troops who was recently killed in an explosion, stated that the relocation was in response to Moscow’s efforts to expose the Pentagon’s illegal operations in the European region. The Russian military said Africa has become a focal point of interest for the US government,

which views the region as an unlimited natural reservoir of dangerous pathogens and a testing ground for experimental medical treatments.

In its latest report, the Defense Ministry identified 18 African countries where research on the resistance of pathogenic microorganisms to medical drugs are reportedly being conducted with US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds. Djibouti, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia, South Africa, and Guinea are among the countries.

<https://www.rt.com/africa/609885-russia-allegations-us-africa-bioweapon-projects/>

Africa is ‘new focus’ of US biolab activities – Moscow

December 24, 2024

Africa has become a focal point of interest for the US government, which views the region as an unlimited natural reservoir of dangerous pathogens and a testing ground for experimental medical treatments, the Russian military has reported.

The Russian Ministry of Defense continues to scrutinize the military-biological activities of the US in Ukraine and other regions worldwide. Previously, attention was drawn to the transfer of unfinished Ukrainian projects to post-Soviet states and Southeast Asia.

According to Major General Aleksey Rtishchev, the deputy chief of the Radiation, Chemical and Biological Defense Troops, Washington’s system for managing biological risks in other countries was tested in Ukraine and Georgia, and is now actively employed in Africa.

In a briefing on Tuesday, Rtishchev said the US views Africa as a limitless natural

reservoir for dangerous infectious agents and a testing ground for experimental medical products. The activities of this system are directed towards acquiring pathogens in endemic areas and natural focal points, he explained, as well as monitoring and managing the biological situation to serve US interests.

According to the report, one of the primary objectives of this initiative is to analyze epidemic situations along the borders of geopolitical adversaries, particularly in regions where military contingents could be deployed.

“US government agencies and private contractors, including companies from so-called ‘Big Pharma’, are involved to establish cooperation with local specialized ministries,” the general said. “The result of this ‘selective assistance’ is a transition to American standards for personnel training, as well as the transfer and consolidation of information about the biological situation, the degradation of national healthcare systems, and the imposition of medical equipment and supplies providers. As a result, participating states lose their national sovereignty in the field of biosafety and become completely dependent on the United States.” Washington is particularly concerned about the efforts of Russia and China to engage with African nations in exposing the true nature of the US military biological programs, according to Rtishchev.

<https://www.rt.com/africa/609863-moscow-us-biolab-activities-africa/>

Cyprus can help rid Syria of chemical weapons and search for its missing, Cypriot top diplomat says

December 21, 2024

Cyprus stands ready to help eliminate Syria’s remaining chemical weapons

stockpiles and to support a search for people whose fate remains unknown after more than a decade of war, the top Cypriot diplomat said. Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said Cyprus’ offer is grounded on its own past experience both with helping rid Syria of chemical weapons 11 years ago and its own ongoing, decades-old search for hundreds of people who disappeared amid fighting between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriots in the 1960s and a 1974 Turkish invasion.

“As a neighboring country located just 65 miles from Syria, Cyprus has a vested interest in Syria’s future. Developments there will directly impact Cyprus, particularly in terms of potential new migratory flows and the risks of terrorism and extremism,” Kombos told The Associated Press in written replies to questions. Kombos said there are “profound concerns” among his counterparts across the region over Syria’s future security, especially regarding a possible resurgence of extremist groups like Islamic State in a fragmented and polarized society.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/cyprus-rid-syria-chemical-weapons-search-missing-cypriot-117012669>

It’s the biolabs, stupid: Is this why Ukraine murdered a Russian general?

December 19, 2024

The shocking assassination of Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, the head of Russia’s Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Protection Forces, reverberates far beyond the streets of Moscow. On December 17, 2024, Kirillov was killed in a brazen bombing, an act the Russian government has denounced as terrorism. While the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) – Kiev’s successor to the Soviet KGB – via ‘anonymous sources’

cited in multiple media outlets, has claimed responsibility, labeling Kirillov a war criminal, the truth about his death is likely far more complex – and far more chilling.

Kirillov's death was not just an attack on a prominent Russian official; it was an attack on the truth. For years, he had been at the forefront of investigating and exposing alleged US-funded biolabs in Ukraine, claiming they were part of a broader Western biological warfare agenda. His assassination raises a deeply unsettling question: Was this a deliberate effort to silence him and prevent his revelations from coming to light?

Kirillov's work was controversial, but his allegations deserved scrutiny. He repeatedly accused the United States of funding clandestine biological laboratories in Ukraine, purportedly operating under the guise of public health initiatives. According to Russian reports, these labs were involved in the development of pathogens that could potentially target specific populations, a claim Washington and Kiev vehemently denied.

Throughout the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Kirillov presented what he claimed were classified documents and intercepted communications proving the existence of such facilities. He argued that the labs represented a serious threat not only to Russia but to global security. Though his assertions were often dismissed in the West as propaganda, they stirred debate and distrust among nations already skeptical of US military and scientific activities abroad.

The timing and method of Kirillov's assassination are too conspicuous to ignore. A bomb concealed on an electric scooter detonated as he left for work, killing him and his assistant. The sophistication of the attack suggests involvement by professionals with

substantial resources. The SBU's admission of responsibility and Russia's subsequent arrest of an alleged Ukrainian agent may seem to provide a tidy explanation. However, there are reasons to believe that more powerful actors had a vested interest in Kirillov's demise.

Kirillov's investigations threatened to unveil a shadowy intersection of science, warfare, and geopolitics. If even a fraction of his claims about the US biolabs in Ukraine were accurate, they would implicate powerful institutions in serious breaches of international law, including violations of the Biological Weapons Convention. Such revelations would have provoked outrage among non-aligned nations and could have seriously undermined the credibility of the United States and its allies.

The age-old question of "*who benefits*" looms large over Kirillov's assassination. The primary beneficiaries of his death are those who sought to discredit or suppress his findings. The US and Ukraine have long denied the existence of offensive biological research programs in Ukrainian laboratories, branding Kirillov's accusations as disinformation aimed at justifying Russian "*aggression*." However, his death conveniently prevents him from providing further evidence to substantiate his claims.

Moreover, silencing Kirillov sends a clear message to other potential whistleblowers: exposing sensitive information about Western military or scientific programs comes with lethal consequences. This chilling effect could deter future investigations into biolabs, leaving critical questions unanswered.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/609653-ukraine-kirillov-biolabs-assassination/>

Joint Statement in Support of the Efforts to Strengthen the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of the Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons, Geneva, 16 December 2024

December 19, 2024

We, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic, the People's Republic of China, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Mali, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of Nicaragua, the Republic of the Niger, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Russian Federation, the State of Eritrea, the Syrian Arab Republic, reaffirm our dedication to protecting humanity from chemical and biological warfare, recognize the common interest of all humankind in excluding completely the possibility of the use of chemical, bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons. Convinced that such use would be repugnant to the conscience of humankind, we are determined to condemn any use of toxic chemicals, biological agents or toxins as weapons by anyone, anywhere, at anytime, and to hold accountable those responsible for any such use.

We underline that the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) and the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (Geneva Protocol) are essential for

international peace and security. We reaffirm that under all circumstances the use, development, production and stockpiling of chemical, bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons are prohibited under Article I of the BWC and under Article I of the CWC. We urge all States Parties to the BWC and the CWC as a priority to fully comply with all their obligations pursuant to those Conventions and to abide by the understandings agreed by the review conferences of the States Parties to the Conventions.

We note efforts by the UN Secretary-General and UN Secretariat, as well as national initiatives to provide relevant training to experts that could support the Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM). At the same time we recognize that there have been developments in the field of science and technology related to the UNSGM and that the situation relating to the CWC, the BWC and the Geneva Protocol regimes (including new challenges and threats such as chemical and biological terrorism) has changed since the establishment of the UNSGM in 1987 and the endorsement of its technical guidelines and procedures in 1990.

Therefore we are convinced that there is need for intensifying efforts of the international community with support of the UN Secretariat to strengthen the expert and technical capabilities of the UNSGM. Particular attention should be paid to the UNSGM guidelines and procedures (document A/44/561), which have not been updated with the exception of their technical appendices (few of their points were revised in 2007) since their endorsement by the UN General Assembly resolution A/45/57Ñ dated December 4, 1990.

<https://mid.ru/en/maps/er/1987743/>

Moscow accuses Kiev of using white phosphorous

December 18, 2024

Ukrainian troops have repeatedly used banned munitions, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has said. Russian law enforcement and the Defense Ministry have collected *"irrefutable evidence"* of repeated use of white phosphorus munitions by the Ukrainian military, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has said.

The spokeswoman made the remarks during a regular media briefing on Wednesday, stating the use of white phosphorus incendiaries by Kiev's troops had been repeatedly observed in September. The munitions were primarily deployed by drones, Zakharova said. She added that the uptick in white phosphorus use indicated Kiev was capable of producing the compound, and is using it in contravention of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

"The white phosphorus-filled incendiary munitions used by the Ukrainian Nazis are indiscriminate weapons and are prohibited by Protocol III of the Geneva Convention on prohibitions or restrictions on the use of certain conventional weapons in populated areas and their environs," she said.

Ukraine was quick to deny the accusations, with the country's Foreign Ministry spokesman Georgy Tikhy dismissing them as *"false and nonsensical."* *"Ukraine has always been and continues to be a reliable participant in multilateral regimes for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction,"* the spokesman asserted in a statement.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/609556-ukraine-white-phosphorous-use/>

Ukraine charges Russian general over use of banned chemical weapons

December 16, 2024

Ukrainian prosecutors charged Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, the head of the Russian Armed Forces' radiation, chemical, and biological defense troops, in absentia with the use of banned chemical weapons in Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said on Dec. 16. According to the SBU's investigation, chemical weapons have been used in more than 4,800 cases since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

Since 2022, over 2,000 Ukrainian service members have been hospitalized with chemical poisoning, and three have died, Ukrainian Colonel Artem Vlasiuk said earlier this week. "Russian forces mostly use ammunition with toxic substances by dropping them from FPV (first-person-view) drones on Ukrainian positions. When chemical grenades are detonated, their poisonous compounds affect human mucous membranes, especially the eyes and respiratory tract," the SBU's statement said.

When detonated, the irritating gases force Ukrainian soldiers finding cover in the trenches to leave and expose themselves to Russian gunfire, the statement noted. Ukraine handed over soil samples that prove the use of banned materials to independent laboratories of the International Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for examination and were confirmed to breach international humanitarian law.

Russia's use of gas attacks is rising, a Kyiv Independent investigation from August showed. Ukrainian soldiers and officers interviewed by the Kyiv Independent acknowledged that the tactic is effective,

allowing Moscow to capture positions occasionally without destroying them. The U.K. issued sanctions against Kirillov and his unit over the use of chemical weapons on the battlefield in Ukraine on Oct. 8. Earlier this year, the U.S. State Department confirmed that Russian forces had used the chemical agent chloropicrin in Ukraine. The announcement was part of a larger statement about introducing new U.S. sanctions against more than 280 individuals and entities.

<https://kyivindependent.com/ukraine-charges-russian-general-over-use-of-banned-chemical-munitions/>

Why chemical weapons remain post-Assad Syria's unfinished nightmare

December 15, 2024

Despite Syrian promises and, as part of a deal brokered by its ally Russia, commitments it made in 2012 by joining the Chemical Weapons Convention in a successful bid to stave off US military intervention, experts from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) believe that stocks of chemical weaponry still exist in the country.

With the fall of Damascus and the toppling of the Assad regime, the whereabouts of those weapons is a matter of great concern. The nightmare scenario feared by the OPCW is that the weapons will fall into the hands of a malign actor. Among the missing chemicals, the existence of which was admitted by the Syrian authorities in 2016, is more than 360 tons of mustard gas, an agent used to such devastating effect during the First World War that it was among the chemicals banned by the Geneva Protocol in 1925.

Also unaccounted for, according to a confidential investigation leaked to The Washington Post, are five tons of precursor

chemicals used to make the nerve agent sarin. When pressed by investigators to explain where it had gone, the Syrians told OPCW investigators it had been "lost during transportation, due to traffic accidents."

On Thursday, the OPCW said it was ready to send investigation teams to Syria as soon as safe access to the country could be negotiated. Reassurance has been offered by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, the armed group that toppled the Assad regime and has now set up an interim government, that it has "no intention to use Assad's chemical weapons or WMD (weapons of mass destruction), under any circumstances, against anyone."

In a statement issued on Dec. 7, it added: "We consider the use of such weapons a crime against humanity, and we will not allow any weapon whatsoever to be used against civilians or transformed into a tool for revenge or destruction." The fact that chemical weapons might still exist in Syria at all is testimony to the failure of international efforts to rid the country of them back in 2012.

"Whether Obama had meant to say that these were real red lines, or they're sort of pinkish lines, everybody in the region thought they were red lines," Sir John Jenkins, former British ambassador to Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, who was in Saudi Arabia at the time, told Arab News.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2583182/middle-east>

Their bodies had turned to black': Syrian chlorine victims can finally speak out

December 14, 2024

A chemical attack on the town of Douma killed 43 people in 2018. Now Assad has fallen, the enforced silence of those who

witnessed it is over. For years, residents of Ghouta, an embattled opposition-held region on the outskirts of Damascus, grew used to death loudly announcing its presence. When Syrian and Russian jets or helicopter gunships roared overhead, bombs were never far behind. But the night of 7 April 2018 was different.

According to an extensive investigation by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), two yellow cylinders were dropped from a Syrian air force helicopter, crashing through the top floor of one apartment building and landing on a balcony of another, in the eastern Ghouta town of Douma. The noise they made was negligible compared with the explosions of barrel bombs and airstrikes. But the concentrated green-yellow chlorine gas that hissed out of the canisters was no less deadly.

In air raids during the five-year-long siege of the town, the people of Douma usually sought shelter in basements. Chlorine is not as dangerous as sarin – a nerve agent that deposed president Bashar al-Assad deployed against civilians on several occasions in the 13-year civil war. But because chlorine is heavier than air, it sank down through the storeys and street-level gratings into two basements. At least 43 people choked to death, their blistered bodies blue and black when civil defence workers brought the corpses out to the street.

Hamad Shukri, now 16, was 10 when the attack happened one street over from his home. In photographs taken at the time, he can be seen cradling his distressed baby brother, holding an oxygen mask to the infant's face in a makeshift hospital that treated about 100 survivors still struggling to breathe. "I remember it very well because there was no explosion, only gas. The adults were throwing water on everyone to try and wash the chemical off," he said. "I didn't

understand what was happening. I just knew that people were dead."

The last rebel group fighting in Douma surrendered to the regime the next day. For six years, afraid of reprisals, the town had grieved in silence for loved ones lost to chemical attacks and countless others killed by conventional weapons. But after an astonishing and rapid offensive by rebel forces led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), more than 50 years of Assad family rule collapsed last week, when the dictator fled to Russia rather than mount a final defence of the capital, Damascus.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/14/their-bodies-had-turned-to-black-syrian-chlorine-victims-can-finally-speak-out>

Growing concerns about fate of Syria's secret chemical weapons stashes

December 13, 2024

For years before its sudden collapse this week, the brutal regime of deposed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad attacked rebels along with civilians caught up in the country's civil war with chemical weapons such as chlorine bombs, sulfur mustard, and the nerve agent sarin. Now, concerns are rising about any remaining stockpiles of these weapons—as well as the scientists involved in the illicit program.

"It is up to the international community to seize this opportunity ... to eradicate this criminal program once and for all," Fernando Arias, director general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), said on 12 December at an emergency meeting of the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). "We have heard positive signals from within Syria on

the need to rid the country of any chemical weapons” left there, he said. However, “To date, we have not received any official request from any Syrian authorities.”

Not waiting for an invitation, Israel swiftly bombed Syrian military assets, including the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC), a sprawling military enterprise thought to employ as many as 20,000 people at institutes across the country. Israel “bombed all of SSRC’s institutes,” including chemical weapons R&D and production facilities, says Boaz Shapira, an analyst with Israel’s Alma Research and Education Center.

<https://www.science.org/content/article/growing-concerns-about-fate-syria-secret-chemical-weapons-stashes>

Assad’s collapse triggers race to find missing chemical weapons

December 12, 2024

In 53 years of Assad family rule, Syria’s government made chemical weapons by the ton, from giant vats of World War I-era mustard gas to nerve agents so deadly that just a few drops could kill. But by far the most worrisome Syrian weapons of mass destruction are the ones that simply disappeared.

The list of the missing is long. It includes, according to an audit by international weapons inspectors, more than 360 tons of mustard gas that Syria admitted making but has never been fully accounted for. Then there’s the five tons of missing precursors for the nerve agent sarin — enough poison to fill a small swimming pool. When pressed, Syrian officials offered an excuse that seemed laughably absurd. “Lost during transportation, due to traffic accidents,” the Syrians said, according to notes from a confidential 2016 investigation obtained by The Washington Post.

What happened to those chemicals — at least some of which are suspected to have been hidden away for future use — is a suddenly urgent question in the wake of last week’s takeover by Syrian rebels. In a country with no governing authority, and with terrorist groups such as the Islamic State roaming its lawless eastern deserts, securing whatever chemicals remain has become a top priority not only for Syria’s neighbors but also for countries around the world.

“Although Assad is gone, the specter of chemical weapons still hangs over Syria,” said Gregory Koblentz, a nonproliferation expert and director of biodefense studies at George Mason University’s Schar School of Policy and Government. While the threat of a large-scale chemical attack appears to be diminished, he said, there is a “growing risk that chemical weapons may be looted by profiteers, competing rebel groups or terrorists.”

OPCW Director General Fernando Arias said afterward that the agency was prepared to send teams to Syria, adding that the watchdog was “much better prepared to face such a challenge” than when OPCW inspectors first arrived in the country 11 years ago. In a statement, the group cited the possible existence of “not only residual elements, but also potential new components” of a chemical weapons program in Syria. U.S. Defense Department officials expressed concern as well, although U.S. personnel have not yet been dispatched to help with the search for weapons. Spokesperson Sabrina Singh told reporters Wednesday that the Pentagon remains focused on ensuring that “chemical weapons do not fall into the wrong hands.” In Syria, rebel leaders behind the weekend’s march into Damascus reiterated claims that they have no interest in chemical weapons, pledging to work with the OPCW to ensure that all dangerous materials are secured and destroyed.

Yet it is still unclear how many weapons remain hidden or what a new disarmament process would look like. A European diplomat familiar with the OPCW's internal deliberations said the group is prepared to work with the successors to the Assad government but added that the stakes are too high to wait until all of the formalities are in place. "We need to talk with the Syrians, no matter who is in charge," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomacy. "We're trying to make everyone understand that there is a risk of proliferation."

It's unknown how much usable sarin or mustard gas remains in Syria. What is irrefutably clear is that Assad once possessed massive quantities of nerve agents and other deadly chemicals. And after swearing that he had given them all up in 2013, he repeatedly used them again. CIA analysts assessed that at least 90 percent of Assad's stockpile was destroyed, intelligence officials have said. But from the start, Western and Middle Eastern intelligence agencies suspected that Assad kept a small amount of sarin in reserve. That suspicion was borne out when Syrian forces used the deadly nerve agent in an attack on a rebel-held town in 2017.

In the years since, Assad's deputies played a shell game with the OPCW, concealing records and frequently blocking access to key scientists and sites to prevent investigators from accounting what Syria once had, and might still possess, according to former inspectors and diplomats. Syria's official explanation for what happened to its weapons was "neither accurate nor complete — there are gaps, discrepancies and inconsistencies," the European diplomat said. Since 2020, when Assad sharply curtailed the OPCW's access, independent insight into

Syria's weapons activity diminished further. Former inspectors said they were left with numbers that simply did not add up and excuses that tended to fall apart on closer examination.

Syrian officials never convincingly explained a 20-ton shortfall in the accounting for a chemical called methylphosphonyl difluoride, or DF, a highly toxic concoction that, when combined with one other chemical, becomes sarin. In their explanations to OPCW inspectors, Syrians officials claimed that a quarter of the missing DF was lost because of traffic accidents. They said the rest — about 15 tons — was expended during weapons tests, an extravagantly large figure that OPCW dismissed as improbable.

It is also possible that Syria succeeded in producing new stores of chemical weapons. Until last week, Syria continued to employ hundreds of scientists and technicians experienced in making military-grade poisons. Although the old chemical weapons factories are gone, U.S. and Middle Eastern intelligence officials believe that Syria continued to conduct research and may have produced small amounts of weapons in laboratories.

Former OPCW officials said they doubt that Syria could have reconstituted its weapons program on a scale that even remotely compares to what existed in 2013. Battered by civil war and international sanctions, and under constant surveillance by multiple foreign intelligence agencies, the Assad government appeared to lack the resources or capacity to rebuild what it had lost, the officials said. "I do not see a strategic option to keep big amounts of sarin in the country while the whole world is watching," said one former official, a European weapons expert who spoke on the condition of anonymity

because of the sensitive nature of his past work in Syria.

To make more weapons, the Syrians would “need the complete chain: They would have to buy the products, import the products, do the research and development, the mixing, production, the filling of munitions,” he said. “This is quite complex, and while the Syrians once had the capability for such complex procedures, I don’t believe they do now.” What remains far more likely is the possibility of a surprise discovery of something the Syrians tried to keep hidden, such as artillery shells that were filled with chemicals before 2013, he said. Whatever exists, in whatever degraded form, he said, it is important that qualified inspectors find and secure the weapons before someone else does. “We are not aware of such things in Syria,” he said, “but it is not excluded.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/12/12/syria-chemical-weapons-search-mustard-sarin/>

OPCW urges Syria to fulfil Chemical Weapons Convention obligations

December 12, 2024

Upon request of the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and in consultation with the Chairperson of the Executive Council, Ambassador Andrés Terán Parral of Ecuador, the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) held an extraordinary meeting today to discuss the ongoing developments in Syria.

In his opening remarks, Director-General Arias reminded the Council that, up until today, Syria had not declared its full chemical weapons programme and that chemical

weapons had been used in Syria on multiple occasions.

“In the past days, the Secretariat has been closely monitoring the situation in Syria with special attention to the status of its chemical weapons-related sites,” said Director-General Arias. “The political and security situation in the country remains volatile.” He added: “The ultimate goal is to achieve the complete elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons programme, and to take part in the process of the international accountability of the former Syrian government and any other identified perpetrators.”

The process began 11 years ago when Syria first acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in September 2013.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat, through its Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), has been working over the years to address gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies in Syria’s initial declaration submitted to the OPCW in 2013. Despite these efforts, significant concerns persist regarding the accuracy and completeness of the declaration, as well as the fate of substantial quantities of unaccounted-for chemical weapons. These unresolved issues remain a major obstacle to verifying the full dismantling of Syria’s chemical weapons programme.

During the same period, the OPCW Technical Secretariat and other independent international investigative bodies have documented and investigated the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in Syria. The OPCW’s findings play a crucial role in supporting accountability for violations of international law and committed atrocities involving the use of toxic chemicals as a weapon.

Director-General Arias informed the Council that, once communication with the new interlocutors in Syria would be established and as soon as the security situation allows it, the next step would be for the OPCW to send a team of experts from the Secretariat to Syria. The Director-General said this would allow the OPCW to collect all relevant information on the current situation regarding chemical weapons-related sites and to assess the work necessary as we move forward.

He added that, while the challenge the Organisation faced today was similar in nature to the one in 2013, when Syria acceded to the Convention, “the main difference is that, today, we are much better prepared to face such a challenge.”

As a State Party to the Convention, Syria has committed to never possess or use chemical weapons, to submit complete declarations related to its chemical weapons programme and to cooperate with the OPCW. Under international law, these legal obligations remain valid regardless of any change in government. The Director-General stated: “Today, after 11 years at the OPCW, this Member State now needs to come into full compliance and, at last, fulfil all its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, relinquishing what is left of its chemical weapons programme”

The OPCW Technical Secretariat remains committed to engaging with the relevant Syrian authorities and international partners to help Syria complete the elimination of its chemical weapons programme.

Achieving full compliance will safeguard the Syrian population, participate in the process of bringing justice to the victims by ensuring that those identified for committing these attacks are held accountable. It will also

contribute to regional stability and the global mission of eradicating chemical weapons. This progress represents a crucial step towards enduring peace and a safer, chemical weapons-free world.

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/12/opcw-urges-syria-fulfil-chemical-weapons-convention-obligations>

OPCW and Republic of Korea promote chemical safety and security in Asia

December 10, 2024

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Republic of Korea organised the 13th edition of the Seoul Workshop on Peaceful Development and Use of Chemistry for OPCW Member States in the Asian region from 12 to 14 November 2024 in Seoul, Republic of Korea.

Asia has the largest regional chemical market in the world. The rapid expansion of Asia’s chemical industry necessitates robust rules and regulations for handling chemicals to enhance chemical safety and security, promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry, ensuring environmental protection and safeguarding public health amid increased industrial activity.

The Seoul workshop addressed the specific capacity-building needs in chemical safety and security in the region. It promoted international cooperation initiatives focused on chemical industry outreach and the practical implementation of Article XI of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Discussions focused on key topics related to the peaceful uses of chemistry, including chemical safety and security management, drawing on the Republic of Korea’s expertise in chemical technology and industrial innovation.

At the opening of the event, Ms Jiyoung Yun, Director of the Disarmament and Non-proliferation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, highlighted Korea's long-standing commitment to uphold the principles and objectives of the CWC. She emphasised that the workshop serves as an important forum to share best practices in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons in Asia, among other things.

“The workshop expanded my knowledge on new security-related technologies, ideas, and concepts to see the global threat of chemical weapons and highlight actions I can do as an individual and as a member of the chemical industry association in the Philippines,” said Reinier Jay Bagabay, Quality and Environmental Manager at Pigmentex, Inc., a participant in the workshop.

“This workshop was very informative in terms of the hazards and risks related to chemicals, especially dual-use chemicals. I learned a lot not only from the presenters but also from the other participants with whom I had the chance to interact. My knowledge on chemical safety and security has increased manifold. Key learning points for me were how to detect any behavioural changes for any potential insider threat and how to enhance the control of chemicals,” said Talal A. Adenwala, Senior Process Support Manager at Lotte Chemical Pakistan Ltd, a participant in the workshop.

Professionals in chemical industry, members of chemical industry associations, academics, and government officials gather in Seoul to exchange knowledge and best practices in chemical safety and security management. The course was attended by 23 participants from 16 OPCW Member States: Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal,

Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, and Viet Nam.

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/12/opcw-and-republic-korea-promote-chemical-safety-and-security-asia>

Germany's voluntary contribution reinforces OPCW activities in relation to Ukraine

December 9, 2024

The Federal Republic of Germany has made a voluntary contribution of •500,000 to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to support activities in relation to Ukraine.

The contribution is to be paid into the Trust Fund for the Implementation of Article X, for the Ukraine Assistance and Protection programme, which will include training of Ukrainian first responders and CBRN-experts.

The contribution was formalised on 3 December 2024 in a signing ceremony held between the Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Germany to the OPCW, H.E. Mr Thomas Schieb, and the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, at the OPCW's Headquarters in The Hague.

Ambassador Schieb thanked the Director-General for the professionalism of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW in providing technical assistance to Ukraine, referring in particular to the three Technical Assistance Visits (TAV) conducted in the period between June and November 2024. He said: “Germany was pleased to donate another half a million Euro to enable the Technical Secretariat, under Article X of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to

continue improving Ukraine's ability to protect its people against the use of chemical weapons as well as to investigate the nature and scale of breaches of the CWC."

Director-General Arias stated: "I express my sincere appreciation to Germany for its strong support to the OPCW's activities and missions. This contribution demonstrates Germany's steadfast commitment to advance the goals of the CWC, and will reinforce the Organisation's ongoing work in relation to Ukraine. It is important for all States Parties to firmly uphold the norm against chemical weapons. The Technical Secretariat stands ready to continue assisting them through independent expertise."

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/12/germany-strengthens-global-chemical-weapons-ban-eu500000-contributions#:~:text=THE%20HAGUE%2C%20Netherlands%E2%80%94%2009%20December,activities%20in%20relation%20to%20Ukraine.>

Sa'ar confirms Israel hit chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets in Syria

December 9, 2024

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar confirmed Monday that Israel had struck suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets in Syria on Sunday, saying it did so in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of hostile actors. At a briefing for foreign media, Sa'ar stressed that Israel was acting as a precaution and that "the only interest we have is the security of Israel and its citizens."

"That's why we attacked strategic weapons systems, like, for example, remaining chemical weapons, or long-range missiles and

rockets, in order that they not fall into the hands of extremists," he said. Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar confirmed Monday that Israel had struck suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets in Syria on Sunday, saying it did so in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of hostile actors.

At a briefing for foreign media, Sa'ar stressed that Israel was acting as a precaution and that "the only interest we have is the security of Israel and its citizens." "That's why we attacked strategic weapons systems, like, for example, remaining chemical weapons, or long-range missiles and rockets, in order that they not fall into the hands of extremists," he said.

Sa'ar's remarks came after Israeli Air Force fighter jets struck dozens of targets across Syria on Sunday, taking out weaponry that Israel feared could fall into the hands of hostile groups, in light of the dramatic fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime.

Syria agreed to give up its chemical weapons stockpile in 2013, after the government was accused of launching an attack near Damascus that killed hundreds of people. However, it is widely believed to have kept some of the weapons and was accused of using them again in subsequent years.

A senior Biden administration officials told reporters that the US is working with Mideast allies to secure and destroy chemical weapons that belonged to the recently collapsed Assad regime in Syria. "We are taking very prudent measures about this [and] doing everything we can to ensure that those materials are not available to anyone and are cared for... We want to make sure that chlorine or things that are far worse are destroyed or secured. There are several efforts in this regard with partners in the region," the senior US official said in a

briefing. The official didn't specify, which countries are involved in the effort.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/saar-confirms-israel-hit-chemical-weapons-sites-and-long-range-rockets-in-syria/>

No matter how long it takes, the perpetrators must be held to account for the use of chemical weapons in Syria: UK statement at the UN Security Council

December 5, 2024

Statement was given by Jess Jambert-Gray, UK Deputy Political Coordinator, at the UN Security Council meeting on chemical weapons in Syria

We have seen a significant escalation of violence spreading across northwest Syria. The UK repeats its call for de-escalation, for the protection of civilians and for the provision of humanitarian aid. We underscore the need for a Syrian-led political solution, and renewed negotiations. We call on all parties to respect international law, including the Chemical Weapons Convention. Any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable.

Colleagues, the 30th of November marked the International Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare. Let us take a moment to recall the appalling human cost of the previous chemical weapon attacks in Syria. The Assad regime's sarin nerve attack in Ghouta in 2013 killed over 1,400 civilians – including hundreds of women and children. When the attack came in the small hours of the morning, families fled to their basements to seek safety. The sarin gas, however was heavier than air, sank down, trapping and killing them indiscriminately.

Facing international condemnation, Syria became a Party to the Chemical Weapons

Convention that year. But the attacks continued – sarin in April 2017, chlorine gas in Douma in 2018 and many more. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has found that Syria has used chemical weapons on no fewer than 38 occasions since 2013.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/no-matter-how-long-it-takes-the-perpetrators-must-be-held-to-account-for-the-use-of-chemical-weapons-in-syria-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

West covering up for Kiev on chemical weapons – Moscow

December 1, 2024

Russia has documented proof of Ukrainian troops indiscriminately using toxins, including against civilians, a Foreign Ministry official has told RT. Ukraine's Western backers are concealing Kiev's use of chemical weapons, Rodion Miroshnik, the Russian Foreign Ministry's ambassador-at-large on the Kiev regime's war crimes, told RT in an exclusive interview. He said Russia has documented proof of Kiev's troops using toxins against Russian soldiers and civilians, but any attempts by Moscow to appeal to international watchdogs are stalled by the West.

"Ukraine has used various types of chemical weapons throughout the conflict, and this is documented and recorded by our relevant departments," Miroshnik stated, adding that the findings have been repeatedly submitted to the Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). He noted that the toxins Kiev uses are supplied by Western states, which also provide it with *"so-called diplomatic cover,"* hushing up its use of prohibited substances.

“[Kiev] sincerely believes that the West will in every possible way shield it from liability for the use of prohibited types of weapons. And, unfortunately, this is exactly what is happening within the framework of a number of international organizations, in particular, the OPCW,” the official stated, noting that Russia’s requests to probe incidents in which Kiev uses chemical weapons *“are blocked with enviable regularity”* and any data Moscow provides as evidence *“is not considered”* at all.

“Under pressure from the Americans, the British, this situation is simply hushed up, talked down, and [doesn’t] turn into a detailed investigation,” he stressed.

According to Miroshnik, as of this past summer, Russian experts had recorded more than 400 instances of prohibited chemical weapons being used by Kiev. They have also discovered a number of laboratories in Ukraine that produce chemical agents and toxic substances. The official noted that Kiev is *“indiscriminate”* when using prohibited types of weapons, targeting both Russian soldiers at the front and civilians via drone attacks.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/608501-west-hush-up-ukraine-chemical-weapons/>

Russia against sending OPCW reps to probe into chemical incidents in Ukraine — diplomat

November 30, 2024

Russia sees no need to engage specialists from the technical secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to conduct probes in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to The Netherlands and Permanent Representative to the organization Vladimir Tarabrin said.

Russia, in his words, doesn’t want to “expose to danger the lives and health of international experts amid the extensive use of various weapons, from drones to various artillery systems, along the combat engagement line.”

Apart from that, “Russia has the necessary expertise to investigate the use of chemical weapons and conducts its national probes as envisaged by the Chemical Weapons Convention,” he stressed, adding that Russia has highly-qualified chemical weapons specialists, thoroughly documents all data it receives and refers collected samples to its national laboratories, which are accredited by the OPCW annually. “Unlike the groundless accusations by Ukraine and its Western sponsors, we use only verified information,” the Russian diplomat said. “We have nothing to hide. And we are ready to answer all questions from the technical secretariat if it has any questions about the reliability of the data we provide.”

“To date, there have been no such inquiries,” Tarabrin noted. “It means that the technical secretariat either has no doubts or is still studying the large amount of data it has received from us.”

<https://tass.com/politics/1879945>

Russia fails to get seat at OPCW Executive Council — vote outcome

November 26, 2024

Russia was unable to obtain a seat at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council for 2025-2027, according to the outcome of the vote that took place during the 29th Conference of OPCW member states.

According to the president of the conference Almir Shakhovich, the two Eastern European group seats at the Executive Council were assigned to North Macedonia and Czechia,

who received 86 and 128 votes, respectively. Russia received 56 votes.

The OPCW Executive Council is the organization's governing body, made up of 41 member states elected by the Conference of member states every two years. The Council supervises the OPCW Technical Secretariat and is responsible for enforcing compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Speaking before the participants of the conference ahead of the vote, Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands, Permanent Representative to the OPCW Vladimir Tarabrin noted that the current situation regarding the participation in the Executive Council "is clear evidence of the crisis that the Organization has fallen into." He pointed out that special attention must be paid to fair geographical distribution, the significance of chemical industry expertise, and political and security interests when deciding on the Council's members. Meanwhile, attempts to obstruct particular countries' membership in the Executive Council "once again demonstrate the desire of certain countries to assume tight control over the OPCW's entire operation," the diplomat underscored.

"Russia holds almost 37% of all declared objects in Eastern Europe that are subject to OPCW inspections," the envoy said. "In this regard, Russia is the undisputed leader in the region. In addition, Russia disposed of the largest chemical weapons arsenal in the world, which it inherited from the USSR. It has unique expertise and knowledge in the destruction and prevention of chemical weapons, as well as how to counter them." According to the envoy, when Czechia and North Macedonia promoted their candidacies, they did not speak about their achievements, but tried to cast a shadow on Russia.

"This says it all," Tarabrin noted.

Meanwhile, one day earlier, head of the Russian delegation, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Kirill Lysogorsky said at the conference that Russia's exclusion from the Executive Council created barriers for an open discussion and exchange of information, and it only diminishes the role and influence of the Organization as the most efficient means of countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

<https://tass.com/politics/1878003>

West 'paralyzes' OPCW Eastern European Group's activity – Russian diplomat

November 25, 2024

Russia is worried about how the West is paralyzing the activities of the Eastern European Group within the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Russian Ambassador to The Netherlands and Permanent Representative to the OPCW Vladimir Tarabrin said.

"Eighteen out of the group's 23 members are either full participants or associate themselves with the European Union and NATO," he said at the 29th conference of OPCW member states. "This effectively allows NATO to monopolize two out of the five groups in the region, which constitutes a violation of point 23 of Article 8 of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which states that 'due regard' be 'specially paid to equitable geographical distribution, to the importance of chemical industry, as well as to political and security interests.'"

"We view the approach of the 18 members of the Eastern European Group who demonstratively ignore the positions of the other members to be irresponsible," the

Russian diplomat said. “Such actions literally paralyze the work of the entire group, which is unable to pass resolutions taking into account the interests of all of its members.”

The OPCW conference is being held in The Hague from November 25 through 29. The conference is expected to address such issues as the situation in Ukraine, the Syrian chemical dossier, and the organization’s budget for 2025. An election for new members of the OPCW Executive Council for 2025-2027 will also be held. Three countries, including Russia, are vying for two seats in the Eastern European Group.

Tarabrin said earlier that Russia’s opponents would spare no effort to prevent Russia’s election. He did not rule out that the West may resort to any provocations, fraud, pressure, blackmail or threats to keep Russia away from OPCW steering bodies.

<https://tass.com/politics/1877137>

Russia gave OPCW over 30 reports proving Ukraine used banned substances, official says

November 25, 2024

Russia provided the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons with at least 30 diplomatic notes that prove Ukraine’s use of banned chemicals, the country’s Deputy Industry and Trade Minister Kirill Lysogorsky said.

“The Kiev regime continues to systematically use toxic chemicals and chemical riot control agents against the Russian Armed Forces, civilians and the leadership of Russian regions in the zone of the special military operation,” he said at the 29th Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW. “Relevant proof, which was based on sample analyses, has been provided to the OPCW Technical Secretariat for distribution to States Parties

to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly.”

“More than 30 such notes have already been handed over,” the official went on to say. “Recently, literally in October and November, two notes were handed over to provide proof of the use of banned chemicals by the Ukrainian armed forces.”

Lysogorsky asked the technical secretariat and OPCW member states to treat this information as responsibly as possible.

“The perpetrators of these crimes must be subjected to just punishment,” he said.

<https://tass.com/politics/1877337>

Russian official describes OPCW note on use of chemicals in Ukraine as absurd

November 25, 2024

A note from the technical secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons about an alleged use of toxic chemical in Ukraine looks absurd, Russian Deputy Industry and Trade Minister Kirill Lysogorsky said.

“The US and its allies, contrary to facts, are persistently trying to accuse Russia of violating the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention,” he said at the 29th Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW. “Serving an example of this is the latest provocative information that was submitted by Ukraine and circulated through a note from the OPCW technical secretariat.”

According to Lysogorsky, who leads the Russian delegation at the OPCW conference, Moscow is checking the information and will report on the outcome through its permanent mission to the OPCW.

“I can tell you my personal observations on this issue,” the official said. “I have carefully studied said note. It looks more like a theater of the absurd.”

“Based on the report, we see that the capability was allegedly used on an empty trench in an area where there are no active combat operations, as the territory of presence of the armed forces of Ukraine and Russia is separated by a river, and the distance is more than 8 kilometers,” Lysogorsky said.

“Russia has much more effective striking capabilities, which are regularly used in order to carry out missions in the special operation zone,” he said. “One of them was demonstrated last week.”

“So we don’t see a point in violating the principles and obligations that we have embraced as part of the convention,” the official went on to say.

<https://tass.com/politics/1877349>

OPCW Conference of the States Parties opens

November 25, 2024

The Twenty-Ninth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CSP-29) opened today in The Hague, Netherlands.

“Today’s international environment is especially challenging and characterised by escalating tensions and constant pressure on the global security architecture. More than ever, the responsibility of the Conference of the States Parties to promote and defend the Chemical Weapons Convention, is brought to the fore,” said OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, at the opening of the Conference.

Key discussion topics during the Conference will be:

- the status of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC); //
- addressing the threat of chemical weapons use;
- developments in science and technology, including emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, which impact the CWC’s implementation;
- engaging with the chemical industry and the scientific community to advance the implementation of the Convention;
- promoting peaceful applications of chemistry and ensuring safe production and secure use of chemicals; /
- the OPCW Programme for Africa;
- promoting universality of the CWC;
- strengthening institutional governance at the OPCW.

The Conference is chaired by the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the OPCW, H.E. Mr Almir Šahoviæ, who assumed his duties from the outgoing Chairperson, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the OPCW, H.E. Mr Suljuk Mustansar Tarar.

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/11/opcw-conference-states-parties-opens>

EU and the OPCW in second high-level chemical-weapons’ dialogue in Brussels

November 21, 2024

The EU and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) held their second high-level meeting in Brussels on November 11, 2024. The goal of

the meeting was to strengthen their cooperation and identify ways to work together to further implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The high-level consultations between the EU Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Stephan Klement, and OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias held at EEAS Headquarters in Brussels on 11 November 2024 underlined the close EU-OPCW partnership.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-opcw-second-high-level-chemical-weapons%E2%80%99-dialogue-brussels_en

BWC working paper nods to TWAS programme

November 21, 2024

The BWC-ICGEB-IAP-TWAS workshop on Science Diplomacy, Biosecurity, and Virus Detection, was held in Trieste, Italy, in March 2024. Clockwise are: Grace Gloria Akurut (from behind), Head, Molecular Biology Section, Uganda Wildlife Authority Diagnostic and Research Laboratory, Uganda; Shokhruh Bozoraliev, Microbiologist, Republican Specialized Scientific-Practical Medical Center of Epidemiology, Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Uzbekistan; Bilal Ahmed Khan, Arturo Falaschi Post-Doctoral Fellow, Molecular Virology Laboratory, ICGEB; Madison Wimmers, Project Officer, Biological Threat Reduction in the Preparedness and Resilience Department, World Organisation for Animal Health; Lamech M. Mwapagha, Associate Professor, Medical Biochemistry, Namibia University of Science and Technology, Kenya; and Kominist Asmamaw (right), PhD Candidate, Biomanufacturing Laboratory, ICGEB, Ethiopia. (Photo: G. Ortolani/TWAS)

A Norwegian Working Paper citing a TWAS science diplomacy programme workshop has been submitted to the Fifth Session of the Working Group on Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Commission (BWC).

The paper summarized the activities of what's called the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. The acknowledgement recognizes the contribution of TWAS, its sister organization the InterAcademy Partnership, and fellow Trieste Science System member the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), in supporting the Implementation Support Unit of UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, which forms the core of the secretariat for the convention.

The paper reads: "From 4 to 8 March 2024, the BWC Implementation Support Unit, together with The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), organized a joint capacity-building course on science diplomacy, biosecurity and virus detection in the framework of Article X in Trieste, Italy. This capacity-building course included an introduction to the BWC, as well as sessions on the relationship between science and diplomacy, biosecurity in low-resource settings and modern virus detection methods. The course was designed to enhance the promotion of biological sciences and technologies for peaceful purposes through South-South cooperation."

<https://twas.org/article/bwc-working-paper-nods-twas-programme>

OPCW technical secretariat involved in Kiev's chemical provocation against Russia – Moscow

November 20, 2024

The Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is involved in the Kiev government's claims of alleged use of riot control agents (RCAs) by Russian troops in the Special Military Operation zone, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

“Regrettably, this time again, the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was implicated in these underhand dealings involving highly questionable evidence collection practices that violate fundamental principles of evidence preservation (the chain of custody),” the ministry said.

The ministry emphasized that the OPCW report, published by the Technical Secretariat, lacks any information about where, when, and under what circumstances the OPCW experts obtained the evidence to support its accusations. Russian radiation, chemical, and biological protection experts will carefully review the report, the statement says.

“The Russian Federation, as a founding state of the CWC, responsibly fulfills its obligations under this international treaty. Russia will continue to closely monitor all instances of the Kiev regime forces' use of toxic chemicals and RCAs, and to duly inform thereof the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the states parties to the Convention,” Russian diplomats added.

The ministry went on to say that Russia has deliberately refrained from requesting technical assistance from the OPCW Technical Secretariat in confirming the use of toxic chemicals and RCAs by the Kiev

regime. This decision was made to avoid endangering the lives and health of international experts, because the Kiev regime makes no exceptions for civilians when it comes to launching all kinds of attacks.

Earlier, OPCW experts said they had detected traces of chlorobenzalmalonitrile, also known as CS gas, in samples collecting somewhere on the frontline in Ukraine's Dnepropetrovsk Region. GS gas irritates the eyes and respiratory tract, but is generally accepted as being non-lethal. Although the substance is used as a riot control agent, it has been banned for use in warfare by the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

The OPCW report will be reviewed during the 29th Session of the Conference of the States Parties, due in The Hague on November 25-29, 2024.

<https://tass.com/politics/1874929>

R&D Areas North of Hamhung: North Korea's Chemical Facilities: Site Profile 3

November 19, 2024

The area to the north of the city of Hamhung is home to academic institutions and research and development (R&D) facilities. Furthermore, there are access tunnels to likely underground areas in the vicinity, and the wider region is home to significant chemical industry. Although literature on these facilities is limited, satellite imagery has been analysed to determine whether it is possible to discern any linkages with or provide insight on North Korea's chemical industry or chemical weapons (CW) programme. Although evidence was circumstantial and no direct linkages could be identified on imagery, the analysis was able to confirm the location of several academic and R&D facilities and contribute

to baselining potential academic and R&D facilities in the area.

While the location of at least part of a CW programme in or around these facilities cannot be ruled out, there were no features that would indicate the likely presence of a CW programme in these facilities.

<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/rd-areas-north-hamhung-north-koreas-chemical-facilities-site-profile-3>

Report of the OPCW Technical Assistance Visit on the Activities Carried Out in Support of a Request by Ukraine (Technical Assistance Visit TAV/04/24)

November 18, 2024

The OPCW Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) received a request from Ukraine for technical assistance under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention), in relation to samples that it had in its custody as well as documentation and evidence related to their collection. Ukraine reported to the Secretariat that these samples had been collected following an incident involving a toxic chemical, on 20 September 2024, on positions of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine near the village of Illinka, in the Dnipropetrovsk region.

Under the same subparagraph of Article VIII of the Convention, Ukraine requested the Secretariat to visit Ukraine and receive the above-mentioned documentation and evidence, to interview witnesses, and to provide a technical evaluation. The Director-General dispatched an OPCW technical assistance visit (TAV) team (TAV team) to provide the requested assistance to Ukraine. The TAV team deployed to Ukraine and

collected related documentation and digital files as well as testimonies from first-hand witnesses, and also received three samples collected by Ukraine: one shell of grenade and two soil samples collected from a trench.

After the deployment, the OPCW Laboratory received the samples from the TAV team, and unpacked and prepared them for off-site analysis by two OPCW designated laboratories selected by the Director-General. This activity was carried out in strict compliance with OPCW procedures. Taken together, the documentation and evidence handed over by Ukraine to the TAV team during the visit, the content of the digital files provided, as well as the information collected and the narrative described by first-hand witnesses, enabled the TAV team to corroborate that, as reported by Ukraine to the OPCW TAV team, the chain of custody of the three samples collected from a trench in Ukraine located along the confrontation lines with the opposing troops, had been maintained.

The results of the analyses of these samples conducted by two OPCW designated laboratories, separately and independently from one another, indicate that both the grenade collected from the trench and the soil sample collected from the dark splatter next to it contained the riot control agent 2-Chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile, known as CS. Upon receipt of the TAV report on 18 November 2024, the Permanent Representation of Ukraine to the OPCW on the same day requested the Secretariat to declassify and share the full report (annexed hereto) with all States Parties to the Convention and to publish it on the OPCW official website.

<https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/11/s-2338-2024%28e%29.pdf>

Training Course on Medical Aspects of Assistance and Protection against Chemical Weapons

October 29, 2024

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), in collaboration with the CWC National Authority of China, successfully conducted a training course on Medical Aspects of Assistance and Protection against Chemical Weapons. The event took place in Xi'an, China, from 14 to 18 October 2024.

The five-day course was designed to strengthen medical preparedness and response capabilities at hospitals, especially the medical management of persons affected, in the aftermath of an attack involving chemical weapons agents or toxic industrial chemicals. It also promoted the exchange of experience, therapeutic approaches, and treatment protocols, as well as strategies for addressing gaps in medical capabilities. The course was organised with the support of the Chinese Air Force Medical University.

The course was opened by the Representative of the Chinese National Authority, who stated: "Co-hosting the training course is a practical measure taken by the Chinese government to support the OPCW's efforts in international cooperation, and also a concrete step of China to promote the international arms control and non-proliferation process." The Technical Secretariat representative thanked the Government of China for jointly organising the event.

Through theoretical teaching and case analysis, participants were provided with a full view of and in-depth knowledge and skills concerning medical aids and protection

against chemical weapons. Highlights of the Training Course included:

- Identification, diagnosis, treatment, and medical management of persons affected by chemical weapons agents and toxic industrial chemicals.
- Reflections on lessons learned from incidents involving chemical weapons agents and toxic industrial chemicals.
- Analysis of the tools and resources necessary for hospital preparedness and response.
- Medical follow up for individuals dealing with the long term effects of exposure to chemical weapons agents or toxic industrial chemicals.

During practical drills and table-top exercises, participants were immersed in simulated conditions of chemical incidents, by which they reinforced their knowledge and skills gathered for emergency medical response.

Participants of the training course included medical and health professionals working at hospitals that attend to victims in a chemical emergency, or medical facilities designated for this purpose in their respective countries. Twenty-three participants from 19 Member States (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Ecuador, Germany, Honduras, India, Iran, Italy, Liberia, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Syria, Thailand, Uruguay, and Zambia), attended the training course. The training course also focused on gender balance, with an equal distribution of female and male participants.

The course was delivered by instructors from the OPCW Technical Secretariat, the

Ministry of National Defence of China and the Chinese Air Force Medical University, who also contributed crucial insights from their professional backgrounds to optimising the training course. Many participants were convinced that, with the knowledge and experience acquired through the training, they were better equipped to enhance the medical preparedness and response in their respective countries.

The medical response to mitigate the impact of the uses of chemical weapons agents and toxic industrial chemicals is a top priority of OPCW's capacity-building efforts in the area of assistance and protection. The course was conducted under Article X "Assistance and Protection Against Chemical Weapons" of the Chemical Weapons Convention, where "Assistance" includes medical antidotes and treatments.

The OPCW remains committed to supporting its Member States in building stronger capacities related to Medical Aspects of Assistance and Protection against Chemical Weapons in line with the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Organisation also encourages its Member States to support similar activities in future.

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/10/training-course-medical-aspects-assistance-and-protection-against>

Satellite images show major expansion at Russian site with secret bioweapons past

October 25, 2024

New construction at a military research site near Moscow reveals a specialized laboratory complex designed to research and handle deadly pathogens, experts say. A few months after Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, satellite imagery captured unusual activity at a restricted

military research facility nestled among the birch forests northeast of Moscow. The Russian site, called Sergiev Posad-6, had been quiet for decades, but it had a notorious Cold War past: It had once been a major research center for biological weapons, with a history of experiments with the viruses that cause smallpox, Ebola and hemorrhagic fevers.

Satellite imagery over the next two years — collected by commercial imaging firms Maxar and Planet Labs — shows construction vehicles renovating the old Soviet-era laboratory and breaking ground on 10 new buildings, totaling more than 250,000 square feet, with several of them bearing hallmarks of biological labs designed to handle extremely dangerous pathogens. There has been no sign such weapons have been used in the Ukraine conflict, but the construction of new labs at Sergiev Posad-6 is being closely watched by U.S. intelligence agencies and bioweapons experts amid worries about Moscow's intentions as the conflict grinds through its third year.

The images showed multiple signatures that, when combined, indicate a high-containment biological facility: dozens of rooftop air handling units, layouts consistent with partitioned labs, underground infrastructure, heightened security features and what appears to be a power plant. In recent weeks, Russian officials have publicly confirmed that the scientists will use the labs to study deadly microbes such as the Ebola viruses, in an effort to strengthen the country's defenses against bioterrorism as well as future pandemics. Under Centers for Disease Control guidelines, U.S. research on Ebola is restricted to laboratories rated as "biological safety level 4" (BSL-4), equipped to handle the most lethal and incurable kinds of viruses and bacteria.

The Russian Ministry of Defense did not respond to a request for comment. Here are the key findings, based on an analysis of satellite images and interviews with current and former U.S. intelligence officials — as well as military, biodefense and satellite imagery experts: Four buildings have an unusually large amount of air-handling equipment, at a scale typically associated with high-containment laboratories.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2024/russia-biological-chemical-weapons-laboratory-expansion/>

Russia shares its concerns about potential chemical provocations in Ukraine with OPCW

October 15, 2024

Russia informed the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) about its concerns over potential chemical provocations in Ukraine, Russia's Ambassador to the Netherlands and Permanent Representative to the organization Vladimir Tarabrin said commenting on the outcome of last week's session of the OPCW Executive Council.

The Russian diplomat recalled that ahead of the session Chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov had warned about Ukraine's plans to stage provocations to accuse Russia of using toxic agents during its special military operation. For these ends, Kiev plans to take advantage of the absence of Russian representatives on the OPCE Executive Council and in case it succeeds, it will continue efforts to oust Russian representatives from the organization's Technical Secretariat, the general said.

"Here, we also informed the OPCW leadership about these concerns," he said.

"Because there are indications that some chemical provocations are being plotted. And after they are staged, there will be attempts to use the mechanisms of the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention. But I hope our preemptive measures have yielded certain results."

In particular, this topic was raised by Russian representatives during the session and a special briefing for the OPCW members.

As for Ukraine, it provided no new evidence to back its allegations that Russia is using toxic agents, Tarabrin noted. "They kept on repeating hackneyed allegations and cited crazy figures, but this was absolutely ungrounded," he stressed. "Not a single document was provided to prove this. So, I don't think anyone is taking this seriously."

<https://tass.com/defense/1856155>

OPCW tried to challenge Russian chemical lab's status — Russian diplomat

October 15, 2024

The Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) tried to challenge the status of a Russian chemical laboratory, Russia's Ambassador to the Netherlands and Permanent Representative to the organization Vladimir Tarabrin said after last week's session of the OPCW Executive Council.

According to the Russian diplomat, the Russian side presented evidence of the use of chemical weapons by the Kiev regime that was certified by the laboratory of the Russian defense ministry's 27th research center. The OPCW Technical Secretariat "tried to question its status, saying that it had not

been authorized by the OPCW to do” what it did, he noted.

Russia, in turned, insisted that the laboratory was acting in a national capacity, but not on the basis of the Technical Secretariat’s mandate. “But this in no way changes its status as an OPCW designated laboratory,” he stressed.

In his words, these attempts to disavow Russia’s documents and distract attention from them lead to an opposite effect. “This clumsy demarche attracted even bigger interest and even those delegations that would have never opted to study them took interest in them,” he added.

According to the Russian diplomat, the Technical Secretariat’s nervous reaction is quite exemplary. “Of course, this is no surprise because we know that, regrettably, the influence of Western employees is very strong in the Technical Secretariat,” he said. “Nevertheless, we hope that our documents will be taken seriously.”

<https://tass.com/politics/1856143>

Ex-SBU officer sees Ukraine, US cooking up plot to expel Russia from OPCW

October 10, 2024

The United States is scheming with Ukraine to expel Russia from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Former Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) officer Vasily Prozorov told TASS

Earlier, Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands Vladimir Tarabrin, who is also Russia’s Permanent Representative to the OPCW, said that Russia had filed its findings about the use of chemical weapons by Kiev to the organization. According to the diplomat, the situation regarding Ukraine

using chemical weapons indicates how politicized the work of the United States and its allies at the OPCW has been. Addressing the 107th OPCW Executive Council session, he said that reports coming from the field that Ukraine is plotting major provocations with the use of toxic chemicals also raise serious concern.

According to Prozorov, “on orders from Washington, [Ukrainian President Vladimir] Zelensky has already instructed the SBU (Ukraine’s Security Service - TASS) to conduct a provocation with toxic warfare agents that could later allow a pretext for dispatching a special OPCW mission to probe into the alleged use of chemical weapons by Russia and expel Russia [from the organization].” The Americans have spent some \$400,000 on this scheme, the ex-SBU officer argued.

At the same time, Prozorov continued, the OPCW received “advice” from its Western curators not to react to Russian statements about how Ukraine violates its convention.

Soon, “we could witness a new deadly attack that kills hundreds of Ukrainians,” he warned. The former Ukrainian intel officer also said that the chemical provocation being plotted “would be especially important for the SBU as it will enable it not only to discredit Russia but also to gain favor with the [Kiev] regime by once again showing its superiority to a rival, GUR (the Ukrainian Defense Ministry Main Intelligence Directorate - TASS).”

<https://tass.com/world/1854691>

Russian embassy urges US to think about risks of Ukrainian chemical terrorism

October 10, 2024

Russia’s embassy in the United States has called on Washington to stop conniving at

Kiev's provocations and think about potential risks stemming from Ukraine's "chemical terrorism."

"We urge Washington to stop cynically indulging in Kiev's provocations for the sake of an illusory desire to inflict a 'strategic defeat' on Russia. Instead of patronizing the Ukrainian puppets who are writhing in agony, the American administration should critically consider what is happening and the possible risks emanating from Ukrainian 'chemical terrorism,'" the embassy told Newsweek.

According to the Russian diplomatic mission, intelligence data indicates that "Ukraine plans to stage a series of anti-Russia provocations involving use of chemical weapons in the special military operation zone." "Preparations by the Kiev regime and its curators are underway to fabricate evidence to accuse Russia of CWC (Chemical Weapons Convention - TASS) violations during combat operations," it said.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said earlier that Ukrainian troops continue using toxic agents against Russian forces and civilians. She cited data from Russia's special services that NATO countries had supplied Ukraine with more than 70 technical devices for identifying toxic substances in a period from July to September 2024.

<https://tass.com/politics/1854347>

Ukraine receiving chemical weapons from the West – Moscow

October 9, 2024

Russia has "irrefutable evidence" of the supply of toxic chemicals to Kiev, the country's mission to the UK has said. The West has been facilitating the supply of banned toxic chemicals to Kiev for use as

chemical weaponry on the frontlines, the Russian Embassy in the UK has said. The mission issued the claim on Tuesday in response to a new round of sanctions imposed by London targeting Russia's Radiological Chemical and Biological Defense Forces (RChBZ) and its head, Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov. London has accused them of "*flagrant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).*"

The embassy strongly rejected the accusations, pointing out that Moscow destroyed its chemical arsenal years ago, with the process overseen by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). "*Russia strictly adheres to the norms of international law, including the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and the Chemical Weapons Convention. There are no chemical weapons in the arsenals of our Armed Forces, which has been confirmed by international inspections,*" the mission said.

In reality, London's accusations were intended to divert attention from the numerous instances of use of chemical weapons by Kiev's forces during the conflict against Moscow, the embassy suggested. "*By groundlessly accusing Russia, they are keeping silent confirmed facts of the use of prohibited toxic substances and chemical agents by the Kiev regime forces,*" it stated, accusing the collective West of facilitating the supply of such toxins to Ukrainian troops.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/605490-ukraine-west-chemical-weapons/>

UK conceals evidence of Kiev's use of banned toxic substances – Russian embassy

October 8, 2024

London keeps turning a blind eye to Kiev's use of toxic chemicals, while British

government officials make baseless allegations of Moscow violating the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Russian embassy in the UK said.

“Russia strictly abides by international law, including the Geneva Conventions and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Our Armed Forces don’t have chemical weapons in their arsenals, which was confirmed by international inspections,” the embassy pointed out in a statement in relation to the United Kingdom’s new sanctions on Russia.

“They make groundless accusations against Russia, while seeking to conceal the evidence of the use of banned toxic substances and chemical agents by the Kiev regime’s forces. It’s not just about chloropicrin, which, by the way, Ukrainian nationalists used during the tragic siege of the Trade Union House in Odessa back in 2014. Meanwhile, there is irrefutable evidence that toxic chemicals, among other things, are supplied to Ukraine with Western assistance,” the statement notes.

The embassy added that the introducing unilateral restrictions on Russia had become a routine for London, which was focused on confrontation. Still, the UK’s sanctions lack legitimacy and effectiveness, the diplomatic mission emphasized.

<https://tass.com/politics/1853711>

UK sanctions Russian troops deploying chemical weapons on the battlefield

October 8, 2024

- Russia’s Radiological Chemical and Biological Defence (CBR) troops and their commander have been sanctioned for the deployment of barbaric chemical weapons in Ukraine

- UK calls out Russia’s flagrant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and urges Russia to immediately cease all such activity
- action continues the Foreign Secretary’s personal mission to target the full spectrum of the Kremlin’s malign activity through our arsenal of sanctions

Russian forces have openly admitted to using hazardous chemical weapons on the battlefield, with widespread use of riot control agents and multiple reports of the use of the toxic choking agent chloropicrin – first deployed on the battlefields of WW1.

Russia’s flagrant disregard for the Chemical Weapons Convention is a serious violation of international law. Agents of Putin’s mafia state were also responsible for deploying the deadly nerve agent Novichok on the streets of Salisbury in 2018, and against opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020. Among those sanctioned today are the Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defence Troops of the Russian Armed Forces and its leader Igor Kirillov, responsible for helping deploy these barbaric weapons. Kirillov has also been a significant mouthpiece for Kremlin disinformation, spreading lies to mask Russia’s shameful and dangerous behaviour.

Foreign Secretary, David Lammy said:

The UK will not sit idly by whilst Putin and his mafia state ride roughshod over international law, including the Chemical Weapons Convention. I have made it my personal mission to challenge this malign activity, and I will not back down.

Russia’s cruel and inhumane tactics on the battlefield are abhorrent and I will use the full arsenal of powers at my disposal to combat Russia’s malign activity.

Let me be clear; Putin and those who carry out his will have nowhere left to hide. We will continue to use sanctions to directly target and counter the Kremlin's attempts to sow fear, division and disorder.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-russian-troops-deploying-chemical-weapons-on-the-battlefield>

Ukraine preparing false flag chemical attack – Moscow

October 7, 2024

Kiev and the West want to frame Russia to undermine its international standing, a senior defense official has said. Ukraine has made extensive preparations for a false flag chemical weapons attack to pin the blame on Russia and attempt to turn Moscow into a pariah at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a senior Russian defense official has said.

Speaking at a briefing on Monday, Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, the head of Russia's chemical and biological defense forces, stated that Moscow *"has information about Ukraine's preparation of false flag attacks aimed at accusing Russia of using toxic substances during the special military operation."* He added that *"proof"* would be provided to OPCW officials.

Given that Kiev lacks the necessary equipment and expertise to frame Russia, several dozen Ukrainian specialists received the relevant training from the OPCW as well as a handful of advanced chemical agent detectors, according to Kirillov. NATO deliveries of chemical protection equipment that far exceed Ukraine's actual needs are further evidence of an impending false flag attack, he added.

Back in July, the US ambassador to the OPCW, Nicole Champagne, explained the

shipments by claiming that the Russian military routinely targets Ukraine with riot control agents and chemical weapons.

Kirillov, however, dismissed the allegations as *"completely unfounded,"* recalling that the OPCW had already confirmed in 2017 that Russia had completely destroyed all of its chemical weapons stockpiles. The destruction process was monitored both by the agency and inspectors from Western countries, including the US.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/605356-ukraine-preparing-false-flag-chemical-attack/>

Kiev seeks to ease national legislation on chemical control

October 7, 2024

Kiev has been trying to simplify the national legislation in the field of chemical substances control for the past few years, Chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said.

"During the past few years Kiev has been trying to ease the national legislation in the field of chemical control. Back in 2022, Ukrainian state agencies proposed simplifying the process for obtaining permits to work with chlorine or even removing it from state control entirely," he said.

The official noted that chlorine is used in the production of toxic chemicals, and its uncontrolled circulation would enable Kiev to use it for unlawful purposes.

According to Kirillov, reports regarding Ukraine's purchases of toxic chemicals listed under the Chemical Weapons Convention, coupled with the silence of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on these matters, raise further

concerns about the supply of triethanolamine to Kiev. Triethanolamine is a compound used in the production of nitrogen mustard. The Ukrainian companies Reagent and Realab are the primary purchasers of this chemical in Ukraine.

In July 2024 alone, Reagent purchased over 160 tons of triethanolamine. However, no public information is available regarding the intended purposes for this purchase. Ukraine has also not disclosed any details about this in its annual reports to the OPCW.

<https://tass.com/politics/1852815>

Kiev seeks to accuse Russia of using chemical agents in Ukraine operation — top brass

October 7, 2024

Russia's Defense Ministry has information that Kiev is plotting provocations to accuse Moscow of using chemical agents in the special military operation in Ukraine, Chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said on Monday.

"The Russian Defense Ministry has information that Ukraine is plotting provocations to accuse the Russian Federation of using chemical agents in the special military operation. As the available data suggests, the fabricated proof will be transferred to OPCW representatives for compiling an allegedly independent report. The materials of the fabricated proof will be used at the 107th session of the OPCW Executive Council that will begin on October 8, 2024 and at the conference of the organization's member states in November this year," the defense official said.

In the opinion of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, the Ukrainian side does not possess the potential and skills to select

materials that meet the organization's requirements, Kirillov said.

"For the purpose of assisting the Kiev regime, two groups of Ukrainian intelligence services numbering more than 40 people underwent training at the Center for Chemistry and Technology in The Hague in June 2024 in selecting samples for documenting facts of the use of chemical weapons. It became known that the Technical Secretariat supplied two batches of analytical control devices to Ukraine in July and September 2024. Overall, it transferred 13 First Defender and 70 LCD 3.3 analyzers meeting the OPCW's requirements for documenting proof," the defense official said.

The Ukrainian side and the OPCW also signed an agreement on Privileges and Immunities in Technical Assistance Visits. The document will enable Ukraine to involve the OPCW in its own interests in circumvention of existing procedures under the Convention, thus imposing false conclusions on the organization on investigating chemical incidents, the Russian defense official said.

"In order to successfully carry through its plans, Kiev intends to take advantage of the absence of Russian representatives in the OPCW Executive Council and, if it succeeds, to seek further depriving representatives of the Russian Federation of posts in the Technical Secretariat," Kirillov stressed.

<https://tass.com/defense/1852817>

Kiev uses Western chemical weapons under guise of smoke shells in Sudzha — top brass

October 7, 2024

The Ukrainian military used Western chemical weapons under the guise of smoke shells in Sudzha in the borderline Kursk area in August this year, Chief of Russia's

Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said on Monday.

“In August 2024, facts were revealed that the Kiev regime covertly used chemical weapons under the guise of smoke shells. In particular, Ukrainian armed gangs used 155mm DM105 cluster munitions in the city of Sudzha in the Kursk Region on August 11, as a result of which more than 20 people suffered,” the defense official said.

“The analysis of the selected samples held at the laboratory of the Russian Defense Ministry’s 27th Scientific Center accredited by the OPCW showed that the personnel were affected by a large amount of inhaled chlorine aerosol and suffocating agents. Meanwhile, the metal chloride mixture was just a means of disguise,” he said.

These munitions in the amount of 3,800 shells were supplied to Ukraine in September 2023 under a military assistance package, Kirillov pointed out.

The study of the toxicity of metal chloride mixture from munitions of this type carried out at the US-made Fort Detrick military laboratory revealed that its combustion products have a strong irritant effect on the upper respiratory tract and can cause severe poisoning, the defense official said.

“This served as the ground for banning the production and use of such shells in the United States,” Kirillov said.

<https://tass.com/defense/1852825>

Defense Ministry dismisses claims of chemical weapon threat emanating from Russia

October 7, 2024

Statements claiming that Russia could possibly use chemical weapons are

groundless, because all stockpiles were destroyed back in 2017, and this was documented by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Chief of Russia’s Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said.

He noted that the large volumes of Western-made personal protective equipment being supplied to Ukraine, far exceeding what would be necessary for a country without chemical weapons, is proof that it is they who are up to no good.

“Claims that these actions are justified by threats from Russia are entirely baseless. Let me remind you that our country fully destroyed its chemical weapons stockpiles in September 2017, ahead of schedule. The destruction was carried out under the full supervision of the OPCW, with inspectors from Western countries, particularly the United States. The complete elimination of these stockpiles was officially confirmed by the organization’s director general,” Kirillov stated during a briefing.

Commenting on Kiev’s excessive requests, he highlighted the appeal made by the Ukrainian Permanent Mission to the EU for the supply of 283,000 military protective kits and gas masks to the Ukrainian armed forces in 2024. This request also includes 500,000 protective gloves and anti-chemical bags of each type, as well as 150,000 antidote kits and 20,000 tests for the rapid detection of chemical warfare agents.

“In 2023, NATO countries supplied Ukraine with a substantial amount of personal protective equipment, totaling over 55,000 kits, along with 600,000 sets of antidotes for organophosphorus substances. Additionally, preparations for detoxifying mustard gas, lewisite, and hydrocyanic acid derivatives have been provided, a total of 750,000 vials. The Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences

has shown a keen interest in these chemicals, as evidenced by their research activities in 2023-2024. Experts from the academy have been focused on developing compounds to mitigate the effects of nerve agents such as VX, sarin, and soman, as well as skin irritants like mustard gas,” Kirillov noted.

<https://tass.com/defense/1852893>

Russia’s FSB finds cache of chemical substances in DPR

October 7, 2024

A cache of weapons and chemical substances has been found in the Donetsk People’s Republic, the regional branch of Russia’s Federal Security Council (FSB) said in a statement. “A cache of weapons and chemical warfare agents was found near the settlement of Pervomayskoye as a result of operational and combat activities by the FSB branch in the Donetsk People’s Republic,” the statement reads.

FSB officers seized 55 hand grenades, 36 mines, an AK-74 machine gun, almost 2,500 cartridges for small arms and four bottles of the chloropicrin toxic substance (a poisonous liquid used in agriculture and industrial manufacturing). “The seized chemical substances have been sent to the Russian Defense Ministry’s research facility for duly disposal,” the FSB branch added. The weapons and ammunition have been handed over to the Russian army for further use.

<https://tass.com/politics/1853175>

Germany keeps ignoring Russia’s requests for information about Navalny’s health — Lavrov

September 29, 2024

After making unsubstantiated claims about the poisoning of Russian blogger Alexey

Navalny, Germany left Russia’s requests for information about his health screenings and treatment unanswered, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has told reporters. At a news conference to sum up the results of his participation in the High-Level Week of the 79th UN General Assembly, Lavrov said that Russia had rushed to transfer Navalny to Germany for treatment without bothering with the necessary formalities.

“We requested the Germans to show us the results of his health screenings that would prove that he was indeed poisoned with the [Novichok] agent. The Germans said that this information is classified and that they would forward it to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. So we contacted them and asked if we can have a look. They replied: ‘The Germans have prohibited us from showing it to you,’ Lavrov said. He added that after the media hype on the issue, Russia once again requested information about Navalny’s diagnosis and treatment before his return to Russia. “There was total silence,” he said.

<https://tass.com/politics/1849353>

Pentagon recommends delivering white phosphorus shells to Ukraine — NBC

September 26, 2024

The Pentagon recommended that the White House began delivering white phosphorus munitions to the Kiev government, the NBC television channel reported citing US officials.

According to the report, senior Pentagon officials have recommended that the US provide Ukraine with white phosphorus munitions for use on the battlefield, but the White House has rejected the idea several times.

According to the sources, the Department of Defense recommended providing the white phosphorus shells to Ukraine as part of several recent aid packages. The officials said, however, that even if the munitions are sent to Ukraine, a public announcement on the issue is unlikely.

White phosphorus is used for military purposes in aerial bombs, aviation cluster ammunition, artillery shells and mines. Incendiary weapons are considered to be conventional but Protocol 3 of the 1980 UN Convention on Inhuman Weapons bans their use against civilians and civilian facilities, as well as in strikes on military targets in civilian areas. Human rights organizations have long been calling for designating white phosphorus munitions as chemical weapons.

<https://tass.com/world/1847807>

Unprepared for the rising, nightmarish risk of biological warfare

September 18, 2024

As D-Day drew near, Gen. George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff, dispatched a messenger to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower in London. Eisenhower was instructed to meet alone with the messenger, a mere major. Part of the secret Operation Peppermint, he was a specialist in radiological poisons.

Washington worried that Germany might use, as a defensive weapon, radioactive residues from small nuclear reactions to contaminate large areas, such as Normandy's beaches. Neither seen nor smelled, the residues could disable, even kill, troops. This threat did not materialize; neither did another, the military use of cholera. But human rights lawyer Michel Paradis shows, in his new book, "The Light of Battle," that Eisenhower took these threats seriously. They were markedly less

menacing than what Roger Brent (professor of basic sciences), T. Greg McKelvey Jr. (adviser to the Rand think tank) and Jason Matheny (Rand's chief executive) describe in their Foreign Affairs article "The New Bioweapons."

The coronavirus, they write, was "an unthinking adversary" that probed the world's defenses against new pathogens. Considering the toll the pandemic took in lives and social disorganization, imagine the "remarkably deadly" pathogens that thinking adversaries might design using rapidly advancing knowledge of molecular and human biology: "In a worst-case scenario, the worldwide death toll might exceed that of the Black Death" in the 14th century that killed 1 in 3 Europeans.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/09/18/biological-warfare-bioterrorism-threat/>

Russia waits for US to explain how warfare agent got in hands Ukrainian troops — diplomat

September 14, 2024

Russia wants the United States to explain how BZ, an incapacitating warfare agent, happened to reach the Ukrainian military, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya said.

"I would like to recall that we are still waiting for the United States, a host country for the planet's only BZ pilot-line production, to explain how this agent happened to be in the hands of Ukrainian saboteurs in Russia's Zaporozhye Region," he said at a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine. "The Russian side thoroughly registers chemical incidents evidencing that Ukraine violates its commitments under the CWC (Chemical Weapons Convention - TASS) and conducts its investigations in strict compliance with the

OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons - TASS) requirements, including on the basis of an OPCW-accredited laboratory of the Russian defense ministry.”

Chief of Russia’s Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said in late August that Ukraine, aided and abetted by the West, regularly violated the Chemical Weapons Convention. According to Kirillov, more than 400 cases of Ukraine using toxic agents, such as BZ, prussic acid, chlorine cyanide, and riot-control chemical agents, including those produced by the United States, had been exposed in the course of the special military operation.

<https://tass.com/politics/1843129>

Apathy and hyperbole cloud the real risks of AI bioweapons

September 12, 2024

“Can chatbots help you build a bioweapon?” a headline in *Foreign Policy* asked. “ChatGPT could make bioterrorism horrifyingly easy,” a *Vox* article warned. “A.I. may save us or construct viruses to kill us,” a *New York Times* opinion piece argued. A glance at many headlines around artificial intelligence (AI) and bioweapons leaves the impression of a technology that is putting sophisticated biological weapons within the reach of any malicious actor intent on causing such harm with disease.

Like other scientific and technological developments before it, AI is dual use: It has the potential to deliver a range of positive outcomes as well as to be used to support nefarious activity by malign actors. And, as with developments ranging from genetic engineering to gene synthesis technologies, AI in its current configurations is unlikely to result in the worst-case scenarios suggested

in these and other headlines—an increase in the use of biological weapons in the next few years.

Bioweapons use and bioterrorism has been, historically, extremely rare. This is not a reason to ignore AI or be sanguine about the risks it poses, but managing those risks is rarely aided by hype. If the development of bioweapons were so simple, more states and terrorist groups would have achieved satisfactory results. The historical evidence shows otherwise. In addition, some of the key developments in science and technology have not found their way into offensive weapons over the last two decades: Biological weapons use has been and remains rare, and to date use by violent non-state actors has been basic, for example a cult’s poisoning of salad bars with salmonella.

The challenge, as it has been for more than two decades, is to avoid apathy and hyperbole about scientific and technological developments that impact biological disarmament and efforts to keep biological weapons out of the war plans and arsenals of violent actors. Debates about AI absorb high-level and community attention and, while initiatives and funding mobilized are welcome, they risk an overly narrow threat focus that loses sight of other risks and opportunities. It is crucial that the disarmament community maintains a broad view, locating risks and opportunities posed by new and emerging technologies within the larger social and technological context that shapes weapon selection and use decisions by both states and violent non-state actors.

As it currently exists, AI might help someone looking for information and the information generated is more likely to be of value to violent actors who aspire to bioweapons. The anticipated risk is hypothetical. More recent studies on the biothreat from AI are starting

to recognize this. As AI matures it will pose other challenges and while there must always be a place for experts, concerned citizens, scientists, and others to identify issues and voice concerns, the complexity of scientific and technological developments and the interactions between them mean a more structured assessment of AI is required. This type of structured analysis and assessment could be from individual states, from a group of experts in civil society, or from a scientific advisory mechanism within the Biological Weapons Convention, the global treaty banning bioweapons.

<https://thebulletin.org/2024/09/apathy-and-hyperbole-cloud-the-real-risks-of-ai-bioweapons/>

Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, US Ambassador Robert Wood, Alternative Representative for Special Political Affairs, New York, New York

September 5, 2024

This month marks 11 years since the adoption of Resolution 2118, which this Council adopted unanimously in response to horrific chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Today the United States wishes to review where we stand on the critical pillars of that Resolution. That Resolution required the full implementation of the OPCW Executive Council's decision necessitating the expeditious destruction of Syria's chemical weapons program under stringent verification.

It stated the Syrian Arab Republic shall not use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain, or transfer chemical weapons and shall cooperate fully with the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), including by giving UN

and OPCW personnel immediate and unfettered access to inspect any and all sites. Resolution 2118 said those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria must be held accountable.

By every one of these measures, the Syrian Arab Republic has not only failed to implement these provisions but has shown utter contempt for the will of this Council and for the families of the men, women, and children who suffered and died due to such attacks. After 11 years of this behavior, we can all see that this regime has no shame whatsoever.

Multiple international investigations have all come to the same conclusion: that the Assad regime repeatedly used chemical weapons against Syrian citizens.

Despite this conclusive evidence, the Syrian Arab Republic refuses to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention by fully and verifiably accounting for its chemical weapon program and arsenal. Even more disturbing is the fact that this regime has yet to take responsibility for the atrocities it has committed against its own citizens.

Director Ebo, we appreciate the OPCW's continuing efforts to verify the accuracy of Syria's declarations, and to press the regime to address the many remaining gaps and inconsistencies. We also laud the professionalism, dedication, impartiality, and determination of the Syria Special Missions.

<https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-chemical-weapons-use-in-syria-2/#:~:text=There%20must%20be%20no%20impunity,by%20anyone%2C%20under%20any%20circumstances.&text=regarding%20the%20accuracy%20and%20completeness,have%20been%20persisting%20since%202014>

West conducts bioweapons experiments on psych patients in Ukraine – research institute

September 2, 2024

The West shirks any ethical or legal concerns by conducting dangerous experiments in psychiatric hospitals in Ukraine and Georgia to create new biological and chemical weapons, a top researcher told TASS.

“We must realize that the nuclear umbrella that still protects us today is deteriorating. Today, biological weapons are becoming a global threat, and COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated this,” Kurchatov Institute Research Center President Mikhail Kovalchuk told TASS. “While nuclear weapons serve as a deterrent and means of intimidation, biological weapons are meant for active use, albeit covertly,” he said in an interview with TASS First Deputy Director General Mikhail Gusman on the occasion of the news agency’s 120th anniversary.

According to the top researcher, advancements in genetics have now reached such heights that it is possible to modify the genome as needed. This means that viruses can be engineered to possess specific properties or even create entirely new synthetic viruses “Therefore, it is no coincidence that as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, the Americans entered all our former republics and socialist countries, took full control of our sanitary-epidemiological stations, and all the collections of viruses and bacteria that were stored in these countries,” he pointed out.

“Why do they need this so badly? Let’s just say it would be strange if people in Siberia started getting sick and dying from West Nile fever. That’s why the Americans are paying special attention to collections that contain viruses and bacteria endemic to this region of Russia,” he explained. “This opens up the

possibility of genetically modifying them to make them significantly more dangerous, and also to disguise the use of such biological weapons under supposedly natural processes,” Kovalchuk emphasized. “And we already see how in Ukraine, near Kharkov, in Georgia, in violation of all norms of morality and law, extremely dangerous research is being conducted, in particular on patients of psychiatric hospitals, in order to create biological and new chemical weapons,” the scientist underscored.

<https://tass.com/politics/1836871>

Kiev preparing more chemical weapons strikes – Moscow

August 27, 2024

The Ukrainians are making specialized shells compatible with Western-donated guns, a Russian commander has claimed. Ukrainian forces are set to increase their use of chemical weapons by making specialized shells compatible with Western-donated artillery systems, the Russian commander responsible for defenses against weapons of mass destruction claimed on Tuesday.

General Igor Kirillov was briefing the media on the work done by his division in the context of the Ukraine conflict. He said Kiev’s troops remain a threat in terms of violating the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

“Operative intelligence suggests that Ukrainian troops are preparing chemical shells compatible with Western-produced artillery systems,” he said, citing military documents recovered from captured Ukrainian positions.

He shared several pages from a Ukrainian manual on the use of a US-designed 155mm self-propelled M109 howitzer in A3GN and A4 configurations. The handbook includes

instructions on how to distinguish and handle munitions with chemical payloads.

Kirillov said Russian chemical weapons experts had identified more than 400 apparent cases of banned arms being used during the ongoing conflict. He expects more to emerge, *“considering the multiple provocations involving toxic chemicals and attempts on the lives of officials in new Russian regions.”*

Among the evidence, the general reported the delivery to Ukraine of roughly 500 tons of Triethanolamine (TEOA), a compound listed under Schedule 3 of the CWC, since it can be used to manufacture nitrogen mustard. A Ukrainian firm imported over 160 tons of the compound in July alone, and Russia found no evidence that the chemical was intended for peaceful purposes, Kirillov said.

“I’d like to remind you how the purchase of similar chemicals by Syria caused an uproar among Western nations,” the general said. Consequently, he added, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the CWC implementing body, last year recommended a full ban on the exportation of dual-use chemicals to the Middle Eastern country.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/603141-ukraine-chemical-weapons-kirillov/>

DOD Introduces New Supercomputer Focused on Biodefense Capabilities

August 15, 2024

DOD Spokesperson Robert L. Ditchey II provided the following readout:

On August 1, the Department of Defense (DoD) and National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) inaugurated a new supercomputing system dedicated to

biological defense at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL).

DoD is working with NNSA to significantly increase the computing capability available to our national biodefense programs. The collaboration has enabled expanding systems of the same system architecture as LLNL’s upcoming exascale supercomputer, El Capitan, which is projected to be the world’s most powerful supercomputer when it becomes operational later this year.

The biodefense-focused system will provide unique capabilities for large-scale simulation and AI-based modeling for a variety of defensive activities, including bio surveillance, threat characterization, advanced materials development, and accelerated medical countermeasures. DoD and NNSA intend to allow the U.S. Government interagency, International Allies and partners, and academia and industry to access the supercomputing capability.

During the inauguration, speakers highlighted the critical role of high-performance computing and interagency collaboration to develop new biodefense capabilities for national security purposes. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Chemical and Biological Defense, Ian Watson, who led the DoD delegation at LLNL, stated, “This new supercomputing system and other technical enablers underscore DoD’s commitment to building enduring advantages and delivering cutting-edge defensive capabilities that will ensure the Total Force can deter or prevail against advanced chemical and biological threats.”

The new supercomputing system, which was funded by DoD’s Chemical and Biological Defense Program, advances a 2023 DoD and NNSA agreement to work together on the nation’s toughest biodefense

challenges. NNSA Livermore Field Office Manager, Janis Parenti, praised this collaboration, noting that DoD's investments paired with NNSA and LLNL's expertise, "will continue to drive cutting-edge science to further enhance and strengthen our nation's capabilities to respond to biological threats."

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3875539/dod-introduces-new-supercomputer-focused-on-biodefense-capabilities/>

Chemical weapons used by Ukraine likely of Western origin – Moscow

August 13, 2024

Smoke munitions deployed by Kiev's troops are probably made in the US or Germany, a senior Russian general has said. An investigation into a reported chemical weapons attack by Ukraine in Kursk Region has found that the munitions used likely originated in the West, a senior Russian military official has said.

On Monday, acting Governor Aleksey Smirnov reported that a Russian repair crew had come under fire from Ukrainian forces and suffered from poisoning. Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, who heads the chemical and biological defense forces, shared the preliminary results of an investigation conducted by his troops.

"Those were smoke munitions. The smoke-producing agent is typical for munitions used by the US and Germany in terms of its composition... It is based on hexachloroethane and zinc oxide," he told the news outlet Zvezda TV. White smoke produced by the mixture of the two compounds is mildly toxic and has a range of military and public-order applications.

Kirillov said the military and the Health Ministry had organized the collection of samples at the site of the reported attack in line with the requirements of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). A Russian lab accredited by the international watchdog is studying them, he said.

Russian officials have some unanswered questions regarding the additives used in the munitions, the general said, *"but we have time and we are not revealing those yet."* The force commanded by Kirillov, which is responsible for protecting troops and civilians from weapons of mass destruction, has identified around 400 incidents in which chemical weapons were used by Ukraine since hostilities with Russia started in 2022. Most cases involved chemical agents typically used by police, but some posed a lethal threat. *"There were cases in which toxins were used, which could only have been synthesized in the US, because no other nation's industry can produce them,"* he said.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/602564-chemical-weapons-kursk-region/>

Ukraine used chemical weapons in Kursk Region – governor

August 12, 2024

Several people have been poisoned after coming under fire from toxic shells, according to Aleksey Smirnov. Ukrainian forces have used chemical weapons in an attack on a group of power company workers in Russia's Kursk Region, acting Governor Aleksey Smirnov reported to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday.

Speaking at an operational meeting dedicated to the ongoing crisis in Kursk Region, where

Kiev has launched a large-scale incursion, Smirnov reported that over the weekend a team working for the Rosseti power company in the Belovsky district *"came under fire, and the shells contained chemical weapons."*

The workers took cover in a police station and survived the attack, the governor added. However, several police officers and the head of the village council were *"poisoned"* during the incident, Smirnov said. The acting governor noted that Kiev's missile attacks in the area have grown, and stated that Ukrainian forces currently control some 28 residential areas in Kursk Region. The fate of nearly 2,000 people who live in these settlements is unknown, Smirnov said.

He also stated that since the start of Ukraine's incursion, some 12 civilians have been killed in the region and 121, including ten children, have been injured. Ukraine launched an attack on Kursk Region last week, in what has been Kiev's largest cross-border assault since the outbreak of the conflict. The Russian Defense Ministry has since reported that the incursion has been halted, and that Kiev's forces have sustained heavy casualties. According to Moscow's latest estimates, Ukraine has so far lost around 1,600 troops and some 200 armored vehicles in the attack.

Putin has described the incursion as a *"large-scale provocation"* and has accused Kiev of *"indiscriminately"* targeting civilians, residential areas, and ambulances. The Russian president ruled out any peace talks with Ukraine while Kiev continues to attack civilians and threaten nuclear power plants, apparently referring to an alleged strike against Russia's Zaporozhye nuclear power facility

<https://www.rt.com/russia/602500-ukraine-chemical-weapons-kursk/>

30th anniversary of Germany's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention: continuing to work for a world free of chemical weapons

August 12, 2024

Chemical weapons are among the most abhorrent weapons developed by humankind. Germany is therefore working for a world free of chemical weapons, as well as for universal implementation of the CWC. 12 August 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of Germany's accession to the Convention. The CWC bans an entire category of weapons of mass destruction – completely and without any exception. It calls for the destruction of all chemical weapons under international supervision.

Since 2023, all officially declared stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed, in a process that was overseen by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague. However, the goal of a world permanently free of chemical weapons has not yet been achieved. This is evident not least in the horrific employment of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war and Russia's use, in contravention of the CWC, of chemical substances in its war of aggression against Ukraine. The same applies to Russia's targeting of opposition figures with nerve agents, such as in the case of Alexey Navalny.

The German Government is therefore, in line with its National Security Strategy, redoubling its efforts to fight chemical weapons and address the risks posed by them. As part of this, Germany contributes to the investigation of Syria's chemical weapons programme and is helping Ukraine protect itself against chemical threats. Germany is also engaged in analysing and addressing the risks that Artificial

Intelligence applications and new technologies pose to the ban on chemical weapons. The German Government calls on all countries that are not yet States Parties to the Convention to immediately either ratify or, if they have not yet done so, to sign it.

Germany will not let up in its efforts to help bring about a world that is free of chemical weapons.

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/2671322-2671322>

Data Science for Chemical and Biological Defense

August 12, 2024

Chemical and biological (CB) data is a strategic asset that can be used to inform decision making within the Department of Defense's (DoD) Chemical and Biological Defense Program (CBDP). However, reliably applying CB datasets to rapidly develop data-informed decision-support capabilities that allow the Joint Force to understand and mitigate CB threats remains a challenge.

Data science as a strategic asset has gained increased traction across the government with the release of policy, including Executive Order 14110 on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence (October 30, 2023) and the DoD Data, Analytics, and Artificial Intelligence Adoption Strategy (June 27, 2023). Therefore, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Chemical and Biological Technologies Department in its role as the Joint Science and Technology Office (JSTO) for Chemical and Biological Defense, an integral component of the CBDP, has invested in leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) to explore and characterize CB threat data. Among a myriad of other use cases, some of

the data will be used to more accurately predict new biomarkers of CB exposure for early detection and diagnostics and to optimize developing new medical countermeasures.

While these initial investments in AI/ML have enabled better understanding of the opportunity areas, they have also illuminated some of the fundamental challenges associated with applying AI/ML technologies to CB data as well as larger fundamental data science challenges across technology areas. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach, creating a strong data science framework for CB data within DTRA JSTO is a key component of a successful CBDP-wide data science enterprise.

To better understand the current data science landscape, DTRA JSTO held a Data Science Workshop that included subject matter experts in both computational and CB science fields from across the government, national labs, federally funded research and development centers, and academia. The overall objectives of this workshop were to:

- Explore new, state-of-the-art technology areas within the field of data science
- Highlight gaps and challenges remaining in this evolving, rapidly changing data science field
- Build an informed path for FY25 DTRA JSTO basic research topic in data science

The workshop included presentations by invited speakers and group discussions. Four speaker presentations covered data standardization, provenance, harmonization, integration, data management and security, as well as community sharing of data. The workshop focused on discussing the regulatory requirements for the quality of

data and the challenges faced with the compliance guidelines for rapidly developing medical countermeasures.

There was a shared understanding among participants that the complexity and variability of CB data types is extensive and the current frameworks for data formatting are too varied to harness it for maximum benefit and value across DTRA JSTO. There is an urgent need for DTRA JSTO, along with the broader data science community, to establish a standardized framework to ensure that reliable, reproducible, and re-usable data is available to develop capabilities to treat and protect the Joint Force. Ideally, standardizing specific data and datasets would allow it to be more efficiently validated, analyzed, and re-used.

Other recommendations from the workshop included employing incentive structures and acquisition vehicles to facilitate re-using and sharing data among the CB community and promoting data standards to build trustworthy partnerships between the DoD and industry. Developing a standardized framework for DTRA JSTO's current efforts will help build a roadmap to inform future research and development investments in data science to produce technology that protects the Joint Force, nation, and our allies.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/478443/data-science-chemical-and-biological-defense>

OPCW boosts efforts to advance implementation of Chemical Weapons Convention in GRULAC region

August 9, 2024

GRULAC (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) countries have been making significant progress in implementing the

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), with ongoing support and collaboration from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Thirty-three experts from 23 GRULAC OPCW Member States gathered earlier this year in Guatemala City, Guatemala, to attend the Twenty-Fifth Regional Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean. The event was organised with the support of Guatemala's National Authority and GRULAC Coordinators from Ecuador and Paraguay.

The three-day event created a new momentum for promoting collaboration and knowledge exchanges, enhancing the significance of the constructive and forward-looking discussions among GRULAC countries and the OPCW Technical Secretariat. It served as a forum to discuss needs, priorities, actions taken, and best practices in relation to the CWC's implementation on both national and regional levels. Participants learned about support offered by the OPCW and heard from experts working with other international organisations, including the World Customs Organisation, the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism/ of the Organization of American States (CICTE), the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC), and the Police Community of the Americas (AMERIPOL).

During the event, OPCW experts emphasised the critical need for Member States to make further progress on establishing and reinforcing administrative, legislative, and judicial measures at the national level so that key provisions of the Convention are in force within their jurisdictions. Nearly half of the countries in the region lack such laws. To date, only 18 GRULAC Member States (55%) have

adopted national legislation covering all initial measures – a set of key legislative measures required to implement the Convention. Ten GRULAC Member States have adopted legislation covering some initial measures, and five have not reported adopting any implementation legislation.

The event featured presentations delivered by OPCW experts and representatives from CWC National Authorities on topics such as CWC-related transport guidance for hazardous chemicals, exchanges on increasing GRULAC representation at the OPCW Technical Secretariat, the Secure Information Exchange System (SIX), Electronic Declarations Information System (EDIS), and on confidentiality considerations in correspondence between Member States and the Technical Secretariat. Also discussed were implementation issues, including verification matters, transfer discrepancies, strategic trade control, preventing the illicit trade of chemicals and the UNSCR 1540 implementation status in the region.

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/08/opcw-boosts-efforts-advance-implementation-chemical-weapons-convention>

Eliminating VX Agent Stockpile

August 5, 2024

The entire U.S. nerve agent VX stockpile was destroyed in September 2022. CDC helped ensure safe destruction of over 4500 tons of nerve agent VX in the U.S. stockpile. CDC did this by reviewing facility air quality monitoring, observing demonstrations of the destruction process, and reviewing potential safety concerns.

When chemical weapons like VX are left in storage for a long time, the threat to public health increases. This is because the munitions may degrade and possibly expose

member of the local community. Congress looked to HHS and CDC to make sure worker and public safety and health were protected during the destruction process. Because CDC's Chemical Demilitarization Program has the resources, capabilities, and expertise, they led the public health oversight.

CDC helped ensure the safe destruction of chemical warfare material for protection of public health. Their responsibilities included reviewing air quality monitoring data, observing demonstrations of the destruction process, and reviewing potential safety concerns. The following list shows specific actions the program had taken to keep the public safe during the destruction of nerve agent VX:

- **Partnering with agencies** – Partnering with regional and state environmental protection agencies, health departments, and federal agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Defense (DoD), and Army chemical agent destruction programs to share information on best practices
- **Conducting safety reviews** – Conducting on-site safety reviews of operational readiness, process safety, industrial hygiene, and medical clinics
- **Developing criteria** – Developing chemical agent air exposure limits with a margin of safety to protect workers and the nearby community; also preventing exposure by review of VX agent monitoring and quality assurance data, personnel protective equipment, and air handling
- **Participating in other programs** – Participating in the Chemical Demilitarization Citizens' Advisory

Commissions (CAC) to provide health-based resources to support state and local health professionals on chemical agent-related issues and the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSPEPP)

<https://www.cdc.gov/chemical-weapons-elimination/success-stories/eliminating-vx-stockpile.html>

Ukrainian POW sheds light on Kiev's use of chemical weapons in special op

August 2, 2024

A Ukrainian chemical laboratory in the Kiev-held area of the Donetsk People's Republic produces munitions with chloropicrin gas, which the Ukrainian military drops on Russian positions using drones, a captured Ukrainian soldier Albert Grigorovich, has told TASS.

"I know the commander. I can give his call sign, surname and first name. This unit instructs other units to make the same kind of bombs. Chemical, incendiary, high-explosive, and the like. Chemical munitions use chloropicrin. It literally burns the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, mouth and respiratory tract. If you drop 50 grams here (on the surface of the table - TASS), you can't see anything for a minute, you just vomit," Grigorovich said.

The substance is stored in special sealed barrels. It is dropped first on dugouts to force out the infantry, who are then attacked by kamikaze drones or conventional shrapnel munitions. Chemical ammunition bursts are hard to hear, and the gas itself is heavier than air, so it accumulates in lowland areas. A drone operator only needs to drop it near a dugout for the soldiers inside it to get poisoned and run out.

"When we were unloading a barrel, a little bit of the substance spilled on the ground. I vomited for two hours, my eyes were watering, it was hard to breathe," Grigorovich said.

<https://tass.com/politics/1824577>

Russia accuses Ukraine of using chemical weapons

July 18, 2024

Moscow is keeping relevant international organizations informed about such incidents, Deputy FM Sergey Ryabkov has said. Ukrainian forces are deploying chemical weapons against Russian troops on the battlefield, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov has said. He added that Moscow has amassed enough evidence to prove that Kiev is working with Washington to produce components for biological weapons.

In a commentary for the Russian Zvezda TV channel on Thursday, Ryabkov claimed that Kiev has been engaged in illegal activities related to chemical and biological warfare. However, he noted that it is necessary *"to separate the issue of the use of chemical warfare agents, which we, of course register in the actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine"* from that of biological weapons research.

The diplomat said that Russia was informing relevant international agencies about both issues and sends reports to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Regarding the violations of the Biological Weapons Convention, Ryabkov stated that during the nearly two-and-a-half-year conflict the Russian military had

collected "comprehensive, extensive material showing the full depth of cooperation between Washington and Kiev in this area."

He described the alleged violations as "unacceptable" and said they were condemned not only by Russia, but also by many members of the international community. At the same time, Ryabkov said Moscow had not been able to get a clear answer about its concerns from Ukraine and its Western backers.

The OPCW defines a chemical weapon as "a chemical used to cause intentional death or harm through its toxic properties," which can be dispersed via bombs, artillery shells, or other delivery devices.

Ryabkov's comments come after the Russian Defense Ministry announced earlier this month it had discovered a Ukrainian chemical laboratory, located not far from the Donbass town of Avdeevka captured by Russian troops, that was apparently used to produce highly toxic hydrogen cyanide. Moscow also claimed, citing a Ukrainian POW, that Kiev used chemical agents to produce kamikaze drones.

Russia has also been sounding the alarm for months about what it says is a vast network of biological laboratories in Ukraine, supported by the US and its NATO allies. The US has acknowledged that there are indeed a number of biolabs on Ukrainian soil, but insists that they are entirely legal and are not being used to produce biological weapons.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/601280-chemical-weapons-ukraine-russia/>

Russia of no chemical threat to Ukraine — Russian diplomat

July 16, 2024

Russia poses no chemical threat to Ukraine and Kiev's stockpiling individual protective gear may mean that it is getting prepared to use toxic agents, Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Vladimir Tarabrin said.

"There is no chemical threat to Ukraine from Russia and there can be none," he said.

At the same time, he drew attention to the fact that Kiev continues to increase its reserves of antidotes, gas masks and other individual protective gear in quantities that considerably exceed its needs. "The question is what all of this is for," he noted. "It looks like for preparing some large-scale provocations. Or for the use of chemical weapons by themselves."

Ukraine applied to the OPCW Technical Secretariat shortly after the beginning of Russia's special military operation asking member countries to help it under Article 10 of the Chemical Weapons Convention. As part of this process, a special fund was set up, which has received 3.9 million euro by now, with 2.4 million of the sum being already used. Apart from that, the OPCW and Ukraine signed a special agreement, under which Kiev is being supplied with air toxin detectors and provided with training courses for its specialists.

Russia has never requested such help, Tarabrin said. "Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops have

enough means and tools not only to timely expose chemical threats but also to swiftly respond to them,” the diplomat said. “We don’t need the OPCW for that. We are closely monitoring the situation along the combat engagement line to prevent Ukraine’s violations of its commitments under the Convention. We will continue informing the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the organization’s member states about any violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention by Ukrainian nationalists.”

<https://tass.com/politics/1817245>

Russia could invite OPCW experts to see proof Ukraine used chemical weapons — envoy

July 16, 2024

Russia could invite OPCW experts to show the evidence that Ukraine used chemical weapons, said Vladimir Tarabrin, Russia’s envoy to the organization.

“We have not invited experts yet, but we do not rule out this scenario,” he said. “If their participation is needed, we will invite them.”

“The question is whether they will come because, according to the official position of the OPCW, we are talking about Ukrainian territory, so that would require an invitation from Ukraine,” Tarabrin, who also serves as Russian ambassador to the Netherlands, went on to say. He said no specific plans are being made for the time being.

“That’s because we ourselves are now conducting the necessary investigation,” the envoy stated. “But unlike the West and Ukraine, we operate with very carefully verified facts. If there is evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Ukraine, we will bring it all to the attention of the OPCW technical secretariat and the member states.”

According to the diplomat, some steps in this direction will not be long in coming. For example, by the fall, Russia plans to send to the OPCW convincing data proving that Ukraine and its Western handlers violated the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

<https://tass.com/politics/1817251>

OPCW holding reserved position on Ukrainian dossier — Russian diplomat

July 16, 2024

The Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has taken a reserved position on Ukraine’s possible use of chemical weapons, Russia’s Permanent Representative to the organization and Ambassador to the Netherlands Vladimir Tarabrin said.

“Attitudes to the reports about the Kiev regime’s crimes are different,” he noted. “The Technical Secretariat is trying to keep a low profile on this matter. It was confined itself to a statement that it is collecting information it is receiving from various sources, not only from Russia and Ukraine, and verifying it. Naturally, it will send its experts if it concludes that chemical weapons were used.”

“By now, according to the Technical Secretariat, there is no concrete evidence proving Russia’s statements, and well as Ukraine’s. That is why the OPCW is refraining from interfering,” he said.

According to the Russian diplomat, Western countries are sparing no effort to accuse and expose Russia of using chemical weapons in Ukraine and then urge collective response from member states. Russia, in turn, continues informing the Technical Secretariat

and member countries about violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention by Ukrainian nationalists, Tarabrin said.

“Developing countries are taking the data we report to the OPCE with interest, asking concrete questions. But due to obvious reasons, they are the ‘receiving’ party,” he added.

<https://tass.com/politics/1817281>

Envoy says West makes preparations at OPCW to accuse Russia of using chemical weapons

July 16, 2024

The West is working with the OPCW technical secretariat to accuse Russia of using chemical weapons, said Vladimir Tarabrin, Russia’s envoy to the organization.

“They are working and will continue to work,” the diplomat, who also serves as Russian ambassador to the Netherlands, told reporters. “We are countering this in every possible way and are trying to show the groundless nature of all these efforts by using concrete facts.”

“So far there are no steps that would indicate that the process of initiating against Russia the mechanisms that were once applied to Syria (stripping it of certain rights - TASS) has begun,” the diplomat continued. “But we see that public opinion is being prepared for a possibility that certain provocations could be organized and charges could be brought against us.”

“But I dare to assure you that we are not sitting idly and are also preparing,” Tarabrin stated.

<https://tass.com/politics/1817263>

Republic of Korea provides •50,000 to support OPCW Conference on role of AI in Chemical Weapons Convention implementation

July 15, 2024

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) welcomes the Republic of Korea’s voluntary contributions of •50,000 to support the OPCW’s upcoming Global Conference on the Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in advancing the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The conference aims to holistically examine the implications of AI technology within the framework of the CWC.

The contribution was formalised on 12 July 2024 in a signing ceremony held between the Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the OPCW, H.E. Mr Hyoung-chan Choe, and the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, at the OPCW’s Headquarters in The Hague./

Ambassador Choe stated: “We highly appreciate the steady progress made by the Technical Secretariat in strengthening its capabilities in science and technology, with an aim of the effective implementation of the CWC.”

“As the first State Party to make voluntary contributions to the ChemTech Centre Project, the Republic of Korea has been actively supporting various initiatives led by the Secretariat in the fields of science and technology, including Artificial Intelligence. In line with this commitment, we have also decided to make a voluntary contribution to the AI Conference to be held in the Kingdom of Morocco in October 2024,” he highlighted.

The Director-General stated: “The Republic of Korea’s important contribution towards this timely conference on AI and the Chemical Weapons Convention is deeply appreciated. AI is a powerful tool that is transforming the chemical sciences. We must be prepared to address both the opportunities and challenges that it could present for the implementation of the CWC. This conference will foster dialogue among experts to ensure AI is used responsibly and contribute positively to global peace and security.”

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/07/republic-korea-provides-eu50000-support-opcw-conference-role-ai-chemical>

Ukraine violated Chemical Weapons Convention – Russian MOD

July 9, 2024

A facility has been found near the Donbass town of Avdeevka that was used to produce the highly toxic hydrogen cyanide, Moscow has said. Russia has found evidence that Ukraine has violated the Chemical Weapons Convention, a top military commander stated on Monday.

Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, who leads Russia’s chemical and biological defense forces, said engineering troops had discovered a laboratory that was apparently used to produce hydrogen cyanide – an extremely dangerous and highly toxic agent used as a chemical weapon during World War I.

The facility is located near Avdeevka, a fortified Donbass town liberated by Russia in February, the general claimed. The improvised laboratory itself was found inside a partially destroyed building in an industrial area, which also had a chemical processing

plant. The facility had a rotary evaporator and several chemical reactors. Protective clothes, including US-made gas masks and Polish hazmat suits, were allegedly found at the site.

According to Kirillov, samples taken from the facility and analyzed in Russian military laboratories contained traces of sulfuric acid and sodium cyanide, which can be used to produce hydrogen cyanide. Traces of cyanide anions – poisonous chemical compounds of the cyano group – were on multiple equipment, the general claimed.

The evidence “clearly shows that the laboratory was used to manufacture poisonous substances,” Kirillov stated. According to the Russian Defense Ministry’s estimates, the facility was capable of producing at least 3kg of chemical agents per day if operated by just two or three people. Hydrogen cyanide can kill a person if they inhale just 70 to 80 milligrams of the agent.

During his briefing, Kirillov noted hydrogen cyanide is among the Chemical Weapons Convention’s so-called “*Schedule 3 chemicals*” – agents with large-scale industrial uses that have the potential of being used for chemical warfare. He added that in May 2024, civilians in the Avdeevka region showed symptoms consistent with hydrogen cyanide poisoning after Ukrainian military drones dropped bombs in the area. Another case was reported in Russia’s Belgorod Region, where Ukrainian ammunition fragments were found that had traces of hydrogen cyanide, Kirillov said.

He also cited a Ukrainian POW, whom he identified as Sergey Batyr, as confirming that laboratories that stored chemical agents were used to make kamikaze drones. In March 2022, Russia accused Ukraine of running a secret biological weapons program with the help of the US. Kiev has denied

having biological weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. The Pentagon has described Russia's claims as "absurd" and "laughable."

<https://www.rt.com/russia/600675-ukraine-violate-chemical-weapons-convention/>

Russian military inspect Ukrainian 'chemical weapons lab'

July 9, 2024

The Russian Defense Ministry has released footage of military personnel inspecting what it says is a makeshift Ukrainian laboratory used to produce substances that could become chemical weapons.

On Monday, Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, who leads Russia's chemical and biological defense forces, said that the facility was discovered near Avdeevka in the Donetsk People's Republic. The town was liberated by Russian forces in February.

According to Kirillov, traces of sulfuric acid and sodium cyanide, as well as cyanide anions – poisonous chemical compounds of the cyano group – were found at the site. Sulfuric acid and sodium cyanide can be used to produce hydrogen cyanide – a highly toxic agent that was used as a chemical weapon during World War I.

Footage released by the military shows a serviceman wearing a hazmat suit and a gas mask collecting samples from various pieces of equipment and containers. He examines a glass jar containing what looks like a yellowish solid substance. A large piece of equipment that appears to be a chemical reactor is also seen in the video.

The Russian serviceman in the video is using a portable chemical analyzer. The clip goes on to show the collected samples arriving at a Russian military site.

According to the Defense Ministry, the laboratory was located in a partially destroyed building filled with debris, and had a large number of empty containers inside.

In his Monday briefing, Kirillov stated that the Russian military has recorded at least two cases of the possible use of hydrogen cyanide by Ukraine forces. In May 2024, civilians in the Avdeevka region showed symptoms consistent with hydrogen cyanide poisoning, he said. The general added that traces of the chemical were also found on ammunition fragments in Russia's Belgorod Region.

<https://www.rt.com/russia/600776-video-ukrainian-chemical-weapons-lab/>

OPCW sends 70 chemical agent detectors to Ukraine

July 9, 2024

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said it provided Ukraine with 70 lightweight chemical detectors and trained 20 specialists to operate them.

This comes after Chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant-General Igor Kirillov said the West and OPCW were preparing to accuse Russia of using chemical weapons in Ukraine. The Russian Defense Ministry later published footage of an inspection of a Ukrainian chemical laboratory that was discovered in a district of Avdeyevka and was presumably intended for the production of chemical warfare agents.

The OPCW said the LCD 3.3 warning devices, which determine the type and concentration of toxic substances, were delivered during a technical assistance visit from July 2-3. In Uzhgorod, OPCW experts also provided training on using the detectors for 20 experts from the Ukrainian State Emergency Service.

<https://tass.com/world/1814765>

Ukraine makes drones to drop chemicals on civilians – Russian Defense Ministry

July 8, 2024

The Kiev regime is using chemical laboratories in large-scale production of drones to drop munitions with toxic chemicals on civilians and Russian servicemen, Chief of Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Protection Troops of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said.

“The presence of chemical laboratories in Ukraine similar to the one detected in Avdeyevka is confirmed by the testimony of Ukrainian armed forces personnel. A Ukrainian prisoner of war, Sergei Batyr, testified on the involvement of American specialists, as well as the participation of these laboratories in the mass production of kamikaze drones,” the general said.

The US fully controls activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Kirillov noted. “To settle accounts with the ‘undesirable’ states, Washington has established an attributive mechanism in the OPCW that was used to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria,” he added.

<https://tass.com/defense/1814053>

France strengthens commitment to global chemical weapons ban with over •900,000 contributions to OPCW activities

July 4, 2024

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) welcomes France’s voluntary contributions totalling •902,500 towards fact-finding efforts in

Syria, enhancing global chemical safety and fostering civil society engagement in disarmament efforts.

The contribution was formalised on 1 July 2024 in a signing ceremony held between the Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of France to the OPCW, H.E. Mr François Alabrune, and the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, at the OPCW’s Headquarters in The Hague./

France has designated •800,000 to be used for the work of the OPCW in Syria including the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

An amount of •70,000 will support CHEMEX Africa 2025, an initiative aimed at strengthening chemical incident response capabilities across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This project will include comprehensive training sessions and practical exercises to enhance regional cooperation and preparedness against chemical threats.

An amount of •30,000 will be used to support the Integrated Advanced Course and Exercise for French Speaking Member States in Africa. This training will deepen the chemical emergency response capabilities of Francophone OPCW Member States, enabling experts to handle complex scenarios effectively.

<https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2024/07/france-strengthens-commitment-global-chemical-weapons-ban-over-eu900000>

SCO advocates compliance with convention banning development of biological weapons

July 4, 2024

Member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) advocate strict compliance with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention [BTWC], a declaration signed at the SCO Summit in Astana on Thursday reads.

“Pointing to the importance of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC), the [SCO] member states favor strict compliance with the convention and the adoption of a legally binding protocol in order to create an effective verification mechanism, and [stand against] the establishment of any mechanisms that duplicate the functions of the BTWC,” the declaration reads.

The SCO also stated in its declaration that the organization urged for full compliance with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC), an important instrument in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

<https://tass.com/world/1812543>

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