

## Chemical Weapons: A Case Study of China

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China is an extremely difficult subject to study where sensitive military matters particularly related to Chemical and Biological weapons (CBW) are concerned. This article will be an attempt to examine the capabilities involving Chemical Weapons (CW) and China's current posture on these issues. The article concludes with some futuristic predictions related to the Chinese policies related to the subject.

During the 1920s, the Chinese warlords had expressed interest in purchasing and manufacturing CW agents. There were no reports of the use of chemical weapons during China's turbulent republican period. The first use of CW is believed to have taken place in 1930 in Wushe, a mountainous area in central Taiwan. Here China's Manchu rulers were forced to cede the provincial island of Taiwan to Japan. At Wushe the Japanese had used chloracetophenone (CN) while crushing the rebellion.

Beginning in 1937, the Japanese army employed a wide range of CW agents during its invasion of China. It is reported that 25% to 30% of Japanese artillery shells and aerial ordinance were chemical bombs which resulted in approximately 10,000 deaths. The CW agents used were diphenylchloroarsine, diphenylcyanoarsine, chloracetophenone (CN), chloropicrin, hydrogen cyanide, phosgene, mustard, and lewisite. However, according to some estimates CW never played a decisive role in the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-1945.

The Chinese resistance group known as the Kuomintang (KMT) operated a chemical warfare center from 1940 to 1945. The fate of KMT CW units after World War II and the Chinese communist takeover in 1949 is unknown. But the CW and equipment abandoned by the Japanese fell into the hands of Chinese communists in 1949. PRC has always made demands that the Japanese should remove the CW which it left behind after the World War II.

Chinese sources are full of information about the US employment of CW during Korean War of 1950-1953. They report that the US forces had used CW on more than 200 occasions. Even

Jiang Zemin (1993 to 2003) had stated that during the Korean War the US forces had used all modern weapons except for nuclear arms. However, according to some US sources there is no evidence that the UN forces of any country had employed CW during the Korean War.

PLA has had a defensive CW program for a long time. PRC takes credit for having trained the North Vietnamese in CW defence and protective gear during Vietnam War. Probably CW was used in some fashion during a brief but violent clash between the Chinese and Soviet military forces in 1969.

## **Disarmament and Current Capabilities**

China signed the Chemical Weapon Convention (CWC) on January 13, 1993 and ratified it on April 25, 1997.<sup>1</sup> They have declared past CW activity to the organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) but it has not made this information public. The OPCW receives states-parties' declarations about their respective In the past they had two to three CW production facilities, which Chinese sources claim as pilot facilities. However no information is available about the types and quantities of the agents used for the production of CW. Such declarations are then verified through the OPCW inspections. OPCW monitors states-parties' facilities and activities as they are pertinent to the Convention's aims. The organisation also relies on the cooperation of other international organisations to assist it with dispatch, delivery and managing on-site activities and training. 'Chemical Weapon'.

According to the reports published by the US Department of Defence in January 2001: China possesses a moderate inventory of traditional weapons. It also states that Beijing has not acknowledged the full extent of its chemical weapons program. They have a wide variety of potential delivery systems like cannon artillery, multiple rocket launchers, mortars, land mines, aerial bombs, SRBMs, and MRBMs. But China has never been well equipped to use the CW offensively because of its geographical and technological limitations.

Their CW defence materiel and methods are dated, bulky, and best suited to defend against an unlikely land invasion from China's western and southern borders. The Chinese have taken active interest in binary CW, which contains two relatively harmless chemicals that react during munitions flight to the target to yield a lethal agent. China feels that these munitions are well suited for a people's war under modern conditions. According to their military sources, due to similarities with civilian industrial products, one can now sufficiently develop and produce chemical weapons on the sly.

## **Capabilities**

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is incapable of targeting continental US because of the absence of chemically armed Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). However, it is capable of hitting regionally deployed military forces by chemical weapons if they possess one. At the same time, Chinese missiles do not have high accuracy and also the spread of chemicals is bound to harm the population other than the US troops. Hence it is very unlikely that they would use such weapons on the US troops operating from bases in other countries as this would lead to a very high collateral damage.

Taiwan is 100 miles away from the mainland China. Hence China would have to use aerial platform or a missile to deliver a CW over there. But China's ultimate aim is unification and hence it would not like the local population to go against it. Also it would factor for the possibility of massive US retaliatory strike before attacking Taiwan by CW. Further, in China's assessment, the perceived CW threat from Taiwan is the least likely scenario.

For China, only continental land war options are amenable to offensive CW. So potential CW war between India and China only remains a theoretical possibility.

## **Footnotes:**

The CWC defines 'chemical weapon' broadly to include the following:

<sup>1</sup> toxic chemicals and their precursors, except where intended for purposes not prohibited by the CWC, as

long as the types and quantities are consistent with such purposes;

- <sup>2</sup> munitions and devices specifically designed to cause death or harm through the toxic properties of toxic chemicals released by using such munitions or devices; and
- <sup>3</sup> any equipment specifically designed for use directly in connection with the employment of such munitions and devices (Article 2.1).

### **CWC bans:**

- 1 Developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, or retaining chemical weapons.
- 2 The direct or indirect transfer of chemical weapons.
- 3 Chemical weapons use or military preparation for use.
- 4 Assisting, encouraging or inducing other states to engage in CWC-prohibited activity.(e) The use of riot control agents “as a method of warfare.”

### **References:**

- 1 <http://www.nti.org/db/china/cwcorg.htm>
- 2 [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/China/Chemical/index.html](http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/China/Chemical/index.html)
- 3 <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/legal/cw/cwindex.html>
- 4 <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6545040.html>