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REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES

U.S. Lethal Chemical Munitions Policy: Issues Facing The Congress

Department of Defense

Current U.S. defense policies require a chemical munitions stockpile to deter and retaliate for enemy chemical attacks. The Department of Defense considers the existing stockpile inadequate and wants to upgrade it with new munitions.

The report provides information on the following issues facing the Congress:

- What is the chemical warfare threat to U.S. forces?
- Why does the United States retain chemical munitions?
- What chemical munitions are needed?
- What new chemical munitions are being developed?
- What constraints would affect the timeliness of a U.S. chemical retaliation?



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CHAPTER 3

WHY DOES THE UNITED STATES RETAIN CHEMICAL MUNITIONS?

U.S. CHEMICAL WARFARE POLICY

The United States maintains a stockpile of chemical munitions to deter other nations from using chemical munitions against U.S. Armed Forces or its allies. If deterrence fails, the stockpile is to provide the option of retaliating in kind against the chemical attack. The Department of Defense says this policy provides the flexibility of a non-nuclear response option to a chemical attack.

On January 22, 1975, the United States ratified the Geneva Protocol which prohibits the use of chemical agents in war. The United States, like a majority of the major signatories, retained the right to retaliate with chemicals should an enemy initiate a chemical attack against it.

During fiscal year 1977 defense appropriation hearings the Secretary of Defense stated that the executive branch has not yet agreed on a new chemical warfare policy. He stated that several studies are underway in this regard and that the administration remains dedicated to achieving an effective, verifiable international prohibition against chemical munitions.

We reviewed the results of a June 1976 study performed by System Planning Corporation for DOD. The study identified the following five alternative chemical warfare policies/postures for deterring and responding to a chemical attack.