

Chemical Weapons in the Middle East

Dec 1, 1988



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Executive Summary

The proliferation of chemical and biological weapons in the Middle East is an accomplished fact. It is too late to prevent the spread of either type of weapon. This poses a potential threat to the United States and to its allies in the region. Fortunately, there are operational constraints that reduce the dangers posed by these weapons and retaliatory policies can reduce the incentive to use them. More specifically:

- At least six Middle East countries manufacture chemical weapons -- Syria, Israel, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Libya -- and the latter four have probably used them. In addition, Iran, Syria, and Iraq are reportedly working on chemical warheads for ballistic missiles.
- At least five countries in the region have, or are working to acquire, a biological warfare capability: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Syria. Iraq and Syria appear to have the most advanced programs.
- West European and Japanese companies and individuals have played a key role in the construction of facilities to manufacture chemical agents, throughout the Middle East.

Efforts to slow the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons must become a high priority of the United State. Among its options are to continue hindering the transfer of production technology, promoting international agreements to strengthen the 1925 Geneva Protocol as well as sanctions against its violators, assisting U.S. allies to acquire defensive gear, and assuring them that the United States will actively support any ally under chemical or biological attack.

- 5 pages

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