



DISEC: Topic 1

THE REGULATION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Background:

Chemical warfare has been widely condemned since it was first used on a massive scale during the first world war. Unfortunately, chemical weapons are cheap, can cause mass casualties, and are relatively easy to produce, even by developing nations. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was adopted by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on 3 September 1992. It allows for the stringent verification of compliance by State Parties. The CWC opened for signature in Paris on 13 January 1993 and entered into force on 29 April 1997. With the entry-into-force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) on 29 April 1997, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was formally established. Under the CWC, the definition of a chemical weapon includes all toxic chemicals and their precursors, except when used for purposes permitted by the Convention – in quantities consistent with such a purpose. Chemical weapons can be divided in about 3 categories: (1) toxic chemicals and their precursors, (2) munitions or devices, and (3) equipment connected with with munitions or devices.

Current Situation:

In April, the OPCW released a report saying "there were reasonable grounds to believe that, at approximately 21:22 in February 2018, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force under the control of the Tiger Forces hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released chlorine over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals."¹ A week later, at a Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, member states agreed to suspend Syria's rights and privileges under the Convention, meaning Syria would not be able to vote or hold office in the Conference.

¹ <https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021/04/IIT%20Coordinator%27s%20Remarks%20on%20the%20Second%20Report%20by%20the%20IIT%2012%20April%202021.pdf>



Important bloc positions:

- Some states have neither signed nor ratified the CWC: **Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan.** **Israel** has signed the convention but never ratified it.
- **Syria:** known to have had chemical weapons from 2012, by 2013 the UN said there were “reasonable grounds” to believe they had used them. In 2014, the OPCW confirmed Syria’s use of chlorine gas.
Here is a great timeline of Syria’s chemical weapon use:
<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>
- **Russia:** has defended Syria for chemical weapon use, and has been accused of using chemical weapons itself, an example being the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent in August 2020. According to the OPCW, Russia had destroyed about 92% of its stockpile in 2015.
- **USA:** along with Russia, is known to have a large stockpile of chemical weapons. By 2016, 89.75% of them had been destroyed.
- **EU:** all countries represented in the OPCW conference voted to suspend Syria’s voting rights at OPCW
- **France:** Has been deeply involved with eliminating chemical weapons. Spearheaded the initiative to sanction Syria in OPCW with removal of voting rights, although largely symbolic.
- **Syria, Russia, China, Iran, Palestine, Pakistan, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan** all voted “no” to stripping Syria’s voting rights.
- **North Korea:** after the USA and Russia, North Korea is estimated to have the world’s largest stockpile of chemical weapons, although the regime claims to have none.

Possible solutions:

- Chemical weapons destruction technologies have been developed to destroy assembled unitary chemical weapons (e.g., artillery projectiles, mortars, air bombs, rockets, rocket warheads, spray tanks), bulk chemical weapons agents, binary munitions and recovered chemical weapons munitions.
- Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons
 - Ensuring that all toxic chemicals, and their precursors, are only used for purposes that are not prohibited by the Convention.
 - Controlling international transfers of chemicals
 - Verify that states follow the Hague ethical guidelines



Further reading:

The OPCW website is very well-organized and a great source to explore.

Here is the website's breakdown of the CWC: <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention>

Bibliography:

- <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/chemical/>
- <https://www.opcw.org/>
- <https://www.opcw.org/our-work/what-chemical-weapon>
- <https://www.opcw.org/work/preventing-re-emergence-chemical-weapons>
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