

PENTAGON URGES NEW NERVE GASES

MAY 10 1974

Modernizing of Chemical
Arsenal Is Advocated

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 9—The Defense Department argued today that it needed a new family of nerve gases to modernize what it described as an inadequate stockpile of chemical munitions.

The Pentagon also took a firm position that the United States should not be precluded from using tear gases and herbicides if it finally ratified the 1925 Geneva protocol banning the military use of chemical weapons.

Accompanied by three generals, three colonels and seven civilian aides, Amos A. Jordan, the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, presented the Pentagon's position in testimony before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee that is reviewing the chemical-warfare policies of the Administration.

The effect of the testimony was to place the Defense Department at odds with the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the American Chemical Society and some leading scientific experts on several aspects of chemical-warfare policy. It also was apparent that in the current National Security Council review of chemical-warfare policy, the Pentagon is resisting any attempt to interpret the 1925 Geneva protocol as precluding tear gas or herbicides.

One Issue: Binary Gases

One of the controversies now developing in the Administration is whether the Defense Department should proceed with production of so-called binary nerve gases. These consist of two chemical agents that when separate are non-toxic but when combined, such as in an artillery shell after it is fired, form a lethal nerve gas.

Taking issue with the position of arms control agency officials and some scientific experts, Mr. Jordan contended that production of the binary nerve gases would not lead to proliferation of nerve gases to smaller nations or terrorist groups and would not complicate efforts at the Geneva disarmament conference to work out a treaty banning the production of chemical weapons.

Mr. Jordan's main justification for proceeding with production of binary nerve gases was the need to modernize the current stockpile of chemical munitions, which he said was "limited" and "does not fully meet our requirements." In the process, he said, the binary gases would resolve "many operational, safety and administrative problems" associated with the present chemical weapons.

Mr. Jordan declined to give any public estimate of the cost of shifting to the binary munitions, but some Congressional estimates have put the cost at \$1-billion to \$2-billion.

Mr. Jordan repeated the Defense Department argument that the United States must maintain a "substantial" stockpile of chemical weapons as a deterrent against the Soviet Union, which he said "is better prepared to operate offensively and defensively in a chemical-warfare environment than any other nation in the world." This argument has been disputed by some scientific experts testifying before the House subcommittee.