米軍基地による環境変化が与える自然および社会への影響に関する複合的研究

Nerve Gas Accident
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Nerve Gas Accident

Okinawa Mishap Bares Overseas Deployment Of Chemical Weapons

Leak at U.S. Base Fells 25; Angry Reaction Expected At Home, From Japanese

Coup for Red Propaganda?

By ROBERT KEATLEY
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WASHINGTON—The United States has apparently deployed operational weapons armed with lethal chemical agents as part of its deterrent force overseas.

That conclusion is indicated by an accidental release of deadly VX nerve gas at the U.S. base on Okinawa last week. A container of the gas or a weapon carrying it broke open there, and some 25 persons were hospitalized after exposure to it. Word of the incident has just gotten back to Washington. At a late hour last night, high Defense and other Administration officials were debating what to say about the matter or whether to say anything at all.

Their sensitivity springs from awareness that disclosure of the unsuspected deployment could have broad and adverse repercussions for the U.S. overseas and for the Administration at home. It could create a wave of anti-American feeling abroad just as President Nixon sets forth next week on a planned triumphal tour following the U.S. moon voyagers' Pacific splashdown. More important, it could touch off violent leftist demonstrations in Japan on the eve of Secretary of State William Rogers' visit there to discuss continued U.S. use of Okinawa as the main American strategic base in Asia. The news will almost certainly prompt propagandists in all Communist countries to attack Washington's political and military objectives.

Capitol Hill Controversy

The information seems certain, in addition, to arouse new Congressional opposition to the development of toxic weapons in particular and to the military in general. Word of the Okinawan accident may come at a particularly bad time for advocates of deployment of the Safeguard Antiballistic Missile, since that project is now being debated by the Senate.

Chemical and bacteriological warfare (CBW) has become highly controversial on Capitol Hill recently. An accident at the Utah testing range killed some 6,400 sheep last year. This spring Americans learned that the Army planned to dispose of some 27,000 tons of "surplus" CBW agents and equipment by transporting them across the country by train and dumping them into the Atlantic Ocean off the New Jersey coast; this plan was widely condemned as dangerous and has since been dropped.

On top of such controversy comes the surprise and troublesome disclosure that such deadly gases are on Okinawa. The island is officially Japanese property; Tokyo retains "residual sovereignty" over the big U.S. Army, Air Force and Marine Corps complex, though the U.S. has nearly complete freedom in managing it. The base also hosts giant B52 bombers and some medium-range missiles deployed as a deterrent aginst Communist China. Nuclear explosives are kept on the base for possible use by these planes and missiles, and that's a main reason for Japanese opposition to continued American use of the island.

The news reaching Washington about the Okinawa incident is little more than that it happened. There is no detail on how it took place. But it is believed that all the victims were American soldiers and none were Okinawan employes. Apparently no deaths occurred, though Pentagon officials will not discuss the matter in detail.

The VX nerve gas that escaped at Okinawa is a mainstay of the U.S. CBW arsenal. It is this agent that drifted outside the Utah testing range last year and killed the sheep in nearby Skull Valley.

A Deadly Gas

VX is one of the deadliest nerve gases in existence, since it persists longer than others when released into the atmosphere. A few milligrams, if inhaled, cause death within seconds; a slightly larger dose on the skin can kill in minutes if certain countermeasures, such as artificial respiration and special drugs, are not taken immediately. In the Okinawan accident, it is believed that countermeasures were quickly taken and that no large area was contaminated.

It is possible that a previous instance of CBW contamination on Okinawa occurred last summer. About 100 Okinawan children became mysteriously ill after swimming near a U.S. base; several were hospitalized with such symptoms as high fevers. American military authorities investigated allegations that chemical agents might have leaked into the sea but told worried Okinawan officials they couldn't find evidence of any such mishap.

An Army technical manual describes the symptoms of nerve gas poisoning as "running nose, tightness of chest, dimness of vision, pinpointing of eye pupils, difficulty in breathing, drooling, excessive sweating, nausea, vomiting, cramps, involuntary defecation and urination, twitching, jerking, staggering, headache, confusion, drowsiness, coma, convulsion, cessation of breathing, death."

Lethal Chemical Agents

Thus far, it has never been disclosed that the U.S. has deployed any lethal chemical agents outside this country. And apparently the Japanese government has never been notified, officially or otherwise, of the presence of nerve gases on Okinawa. The disclosure seems certain to prompt an angry storm of reaction in Japan. Leftists there have demonstrated frequently against the U.S. use of nonlethal tear and nausea gases in South Vietnam, and the use of napalm against North Vietnam. And now experts on Japan are expressing concern about new outbursts in Tokyo against the storage on Okinawa of CBW agents, which are more feared and closer to home than any weapons deployed in Vietnam.

The Army recently told Congress that it spends about $350 million annually on various phases of CBW research and development. The chemical agents include nerve and other gases that produce various physical effects ranging from temporary incapacitation to death. Biol-

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Nerve Gas Accident: Deployment of Toxic Weapons Abroad Bared

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ogical agents, including germs and viruses, cause diseases, some fatal; current Army research involves studies, for example, of ways to spread plague and other disabling illnesses. But the Okinawa accident did not involve such biological weapons, and there is no reason to believe that any such agents are located there

Recent protests over the existence of chemical and biological weapons—certain to mount now—have already caused the Senate Armed Services Committee to cut from this fiscal year's budget $16 million planned for research and development on lethal offensive CBW weapons. Democratic Sen. Thomas McIntyre of New Hampshire explained: "Measured against this nation's traditional opposition to the offensive use of such agents, we could not justify research and development exepnditures for that purpose."

Though it isn't known just what weapons or gas containers were involved in the Okinawa incident, several ways of delivering CBW agents have been developed by military researchers. These include grenades, shells and small ground-to-ground rockets that would explode on impact, releasing the agents. There are also bombs and airplane-launched rockets; such bombs would probably be triggered just above ground rather than on impact so the CBW agents would cover a large area.

The CBW material the Army recently proposed to sink off the New Jersey coast included 2,660 tons of rockets and 12,322 tons of Air Force bomb clusters, both filled with nerve gas.

Another system involves the use of generators. A CBW generator includes a tank filled with an agent, a source of pressure and a nozzle through which the agent is pumped into the atmosphere—upwind of the target area.

One report says the Army missiles called Corporal and Sergeant were designed at least partly for delivery of CBW agents. Sergeant, it has been claimed, can fire a 1,600-pound payload about 85 miles; according to one estimate, if this missile's warhead were filled with nerve gas and the gas were dispensed by an aerosol spray process, it could kill about one-third of the people in an area one mile in diameter. These missiles are deployed in Western Europe, but it's not known if they are armed with CBW warheads.

Years ago President Franklin Roosevelt vowed the U.S. would never be the first to use chemical or biological weapons in warfare, and this presumably remains official policy. But the Pentagon has consistently opposed efforts to restrict sharply U.S. development of such hardware; military men contend this country must know about ways of devising CBW weapons, if only for deterrent reasons.

The Soviet Union, it is reported, has a large CBW research and development program of its own. Back in 1960, Lt. Gen. A. G. Trudeau, then the U.S. Army's research chief, told Congress that "we know that the Soviets are putting a high priority on development of lethal and nonlethal weapons, and that their weapons stockpile consists of about one-sixth chemical munitions. Russian leaders have boasted that they are fully prepared to use new chemical weapons of great significance, and we know Soviet forces are trained in their use."

A 1960 Army study claims each Soviet division has a "specific unit devoted to the field of chemical warfare." A Russian general was quoted as stating: "Many of our scientists . . . regard research on the actions of poisons and on the development of antidotes to be their patriotic duty."

To justify its CBW activities, the U.S. Army emphasizes the idea of "retaliatory capability as a deterrent." The generals also stress they must know what the offensive capabilities of such weapons are before they can devise defenses. In addition, many military men justify such weapons as being more efficient and much less destructive than nuclear weapons; they emphasize that many CBW agents are only temporarily disabling but not lethal.