



CONGRESSMAN CURT WELDON

7th District Pennsylvania



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**STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE CURT WELDON
CHAIRMAN, MILITARY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
HEARING ON CHEMICAL-BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE FOR U.S. FORCES**

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Historically, ensuring that U.S. armed forces are prepared to fight on a battlefield that may be contaminated by chemical or biological agents has been a difficult and nagging problem for the military services. When the threat of use of chemical or biological weapons by an adversary is imminent, as it was during the Gulf War, additional emphasis is placed on training and readiness to ensure that the troops are prepared. In intervening times, when the threat is not imminent, the emphasis on chemical and biological defense is reduced and the preparedness of the force suffers.

I trust that we learned a lesson in the six months that preceded the air and ground operations of Operation Desert Storm. And that the lesson stuck! The number of nations with chemical and biological weapons capabilities is increasing, as is the sophistication of chemical and biological warfare capabilities among the nations of the world that would seek such capabilities. The briefing that we received from the Intelligence Community this morning and the extent of the biological weapons program of the Former Soviet Union and potential for proliferation of chemical and biological weapons technology, which we expect to be discussed by Dr. Alibek in his testimony, are sobering. They emphasize the need for our armed forces and those of our allies to consider very seriously the potential threat posed by these weapons of mass destruction, the need for preparedness on the part of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines in the field, and the need for a strong, robust chemical and biological defense research, development, and acquisition program.

As this committee has reviewed the chemical and biological defense program and the domestic emergency preparedness program, we have observed and supported the measures taken by the Department of Defense to improve the effectiveness of these programs. Our witnesses today will testify to the results of those efforts with respect to the preparedness of our forces in the field, the new equipment that is emerging from the research, development, and acquisition program, and newer technologies that will be fielded in the future.

Last year, in testimony before the Senate Veterans' Affairs committee, the GAO concluded that it believed that the DOD was moving in the right direction in increasing its emphasis on improving its chemical and biological defense capabilities. The GAO witness said that increased emphasis by the Combatant Commanders-in-Chief, a DOD-wide spending increase leading to increased numbers of fielded chemical

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and biological detection and protective equipment, and planned procurements of equipment over the next several years would make U.S. forces better prepared to deal with chemical and biological weapons than in the past. The witness also stated, however, that greater diligence and more action would be needed by the DOD to maintain progress toward achieving a level of protection for our forces that would enable us to achieve wartime objectives.

As Mr. Hunter emphasized in his remarks and I want to reemphasize, improvements in technical capabilities will mean nothing, if our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are not trained and ready. On the tactical battlefield the warning time for an enemy chemical or biological attack will be short or non-existent. This means that immunization of the troops against probable biological agents must be current, casualty treatment and decontamination capabilities must be available, and the troops must be equipped and capable of taking protective measures at the first sign of a chemical or biological attack. There will be little time to react after such attacks are detected.

Ensuring that our troops are resourced and prepared is a mutual responsibility - Congress, the Administration, the Pentagon. To our commanders in the field - officer and non-commissioned officers alike - will fall the ultimate responsibility for training our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines and enforcing the standards of performance and discipline necessary to survive, fight, and win on the chemical-biological battlefield.

Mr. Hunter, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on where we are today and where we need to go in the future to ensure that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are prepared for the threat of chemical-biological warfare.

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