

Committee: Security Council (SC)

Issue: Reinforcing Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Mechanisms in Response to the Threat of Chemical Weapons Use in Armed Conflicts: The Case of the Russia–Ukraine War

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Introduction

The use and proliferation of chemical weapons remains a grave threat to global peace and security. Chemical weapons are universally condemned and prohibited under international law through the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), monitored by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). These weapons are classified as weapons of mass destruction due to their devastating humanitarian and environmental impact.

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, which began with Russia's invasion in February 2022, has raised serious concerns about violations of international disarmament norms. In May 2024, the United States formally determined that Russia used the chemical weapon chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops and riot control agents as a method of warfare in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The OPCW has since confirmed chemical weapons use through multiple technical assistance visits, finding riot control agent CS at confrontation sites in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region.

European intelligence agencies report that Russia has intensified its chemical weapons use, with at least three Ukrainian deaths linked to these weapons and over 2,500 people reporting related symptoms. Russian soldiers and state media have openly documented their use of chemical agents to "smoke out" Ukrainian forces from fortified positions.

These developments represent a significant challenge to the nearly century-old international norm against chemical weapons use. The Russia-Ukraine war has reignited global fears of a breakdown in chemical weapons norms, given the credible allegations of systematic use, accompanying disinformation campaigns, and the geopolitical deadlock in international enforcement mechanisms. The situation demands urgent international attention to prevent the normalization of chemical weapons use and preserve the integrity of international law.

Definition of Key Terms

WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction)

WMD are weapons capable of causing mass death and destruction, with severe impacts on human life, infrastructure, and the environment. They are typically divided into three categories: nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Nuclear weapons, like atomic bombs, release massive energy and radiation, causing widespread devastation. Biological weapons use viruses, bacteria, or other agents to spread disease and incapacitate or kill. Chemical weapons, such as sarin or mustard gas, damage the nervous system or cause severe injuries. In some cases, radiological weapons (“dirty bombs”) and large explosives are also considered WMDs due to their destructive potential and ability to incite panic.

CWC (Chemical Weapons Convention)

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is an international treaty that bans the development, production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons. It defines chemical weapons as toxic chemicals, their precursors, and related delivery systems or equipment. The treaty is enforced by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which oversees inspections and verification. The CWC promotes disarmament and ensures chemistry is used only for peaceful purposes.

OPCW (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons)

The OPCW defines chemical weapons as toxic chemicals and their precursors, munitions, and related equipment that are intended to cause death or harm through their chemical action. These weapons are prohibited when used for non-peaceful purposes. The organization’s main mission is to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which aims to eliminate the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons worldwide. While the broader term Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) includes nuclear and biological weapons, the OPCW specifically focuses on chemical weapons and works to prevent their spread and use.

UNODA (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs)

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) works to promote disarmament and non-proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. In relation to chemical weapons, UNODA supports the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), encourages international cooperation, and assists member states in strengthening national legislation and compliance. It also helps coordinate international responses to alleged chemical weapon use, provides

policy guidance, and supports transparency and confidence-building measures to prevent the spread and use of chemical weapons globally.

ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) opposes the use of chemical weapons based on international humanitarian law, which prohibits weapons that cause unnecessary suffering or indiscriminate harm. While the ICRC does not enforce treaties, it advocates for the elimination of chemical weapons, promotes adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and raises awareness about the humanitarian consequences of their use. It also supports victims of chemical weapons and works with governments and organizations to ensure that such weapons are never used in armed conflict.

ICC (International Criminal Court)

The International Criminal Court (ICC) considers the use of chemical weapons a serious violation of international law and, in certain contexts, a war crime. While the ICC does not specialize in chemical weapons, it has jurisdiction over war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, which can include the use of chemical weapons during armed conflict. The court can investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for such crimes, helping to ensure accountability and deter future use. The ICC works in cooperation with other international bodies to uphold justice and reinforce the prohibition of chemical weapons under international law.

WHO (World Health Organization)

The World Health Organization (WHO) plays a supportive role in relation to chemical weapons by focusing on public health and medical response. Although it does not regulate or ban chemical weapons, the WHO helps countries prepare for and respond to chemical attacks by providing medical guidance, emergency response strategies, and scientific expertise on the health effects of toxic chemicals. It also trains healthcare workers and emergency responders, builds national response capacities, and collaborates with organizations like the OPCW and the United Nations to coordinate efforts during chemical weapon incidents.

UNEP (UN Environment Programme)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) addresses the environmental impacts of chemical weapons and their use. While it does not regulate or enforce bans on chemical weapons, UNEP plays a key role in assessing environmental damage caused by their production, storage, or deployment. It provides scientific expertise, supports cleanup and recovery efforts in affected areas, and promotes the safe management of toxic chemicals. UNEP also works with international partners to raise awareness about the long-term environmental and health consequences of chemical weapons and encourages sustainable, chemical-free alternatives.

WCO (World Customs Organization)

The World Customs Organization (WCO) supports efforts to prevent the spread of chemical weapons by helping countries control the cross-border movement of dangerous chemicals and related materials. While it does not directly regulate chemical weapons, the WCO works closely with international agreements like the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by developing customs standards, risk management tools, and training programs to detect and stop illicit trafficking. It assists customs authorities worldwide in identifying dual-use chemicals—substances that can be used for both civilian and military purposes—and strengthens border security to help prevent chemical weapons proliferation.

Interpol (International Criminal Police Organization)

Interpol is an intergovernmental organization that facilitates international police cooperation. Based on international law, the organization acts as a platform for law enforcement agencies. It is the world's largest international police organization, facilitating cooperation between law enforcement agencies across 195 member countries. Established in 1923 and headquartered in Lyon, France, Interpol enables police forces to share information, coordinate investigations, and track criminals across borders through secure databases and communication networks. The organization issues international notices (such as Red Notices for wanted persons) and provides technical assistance to combat transnational crime, including terrorism, cybercrime, human trafficking, and organized crime.

History

Background and Pre-2022 Tensions

The roots of the current conflict trace back to Ukraine's post-Soviet independence in 1991 and subsequent geopolitical tensions. Key factors include Ukraine's westward orientation, NATO expansion discussions, and Russia's desire to maintain influence over former Soviet territories.

2013-2014: Euromaidan and Initial Conflict

The immediate crisis began with the 2013 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, triggered by President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to suspend EU association agreements in favor of closer ties with Russia. Yanukovich's February 2014 ouster led to Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region.

2014-2022: The Donbas War

For eight years, a low-intensity conflict persisted in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, with Russian-backed separatists controlling significant territory. The Minsk Agreements (2014, 2015) aimed to resolve the conflict but were never fully implemented. This period saw approximately 14,000 casualties and established a frozen conflict dynamic.

February 24, 2022: Full-Scale Invasion

Russia launched a comprehensive invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, attacking from multiple directions with the apparent goal of regime change in Kyiv. The invasion featured:

- Multi-front attacks targeting major cities including Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Mariupol
- Massive missile and artillery bombardments of civilian infrastructure
- Naval blockade of Ukrainian ports

Key Phases of the War (2022-2025)

Initial Phase (February-April 2022):

- Failed Russian assault on Kyiv
- Siege and destruction of Mariupol
- Discovery of civilian casualties in Bucha and other liberated areas

Ukrainian Counteroffensives (2022):

- September 2022: Successful Kharkiv counteroffensive
- November 2022: Liberation of Kherson city

Attritional Warfare (2023-2024):

- Failed Ukrainian summer offensive (2023)
- Russian capture of Avdiivka (February 2024)

- Continued fighting along largely static front lines

Current Situation (2024-2025):

The conflict has evolved into a prolonged war of attrition, with chemical weapons allegations emerging as a significant concern. Russia has gradually gained limited territorial advances while Ukraine maintains resistance with continued Western military support.

Chemical Weapons Dimension

Chemical weapons allegations became prominent in 2024, with the U.S. formally determining Russian use of chloropicrin and riot control agents. The OPCW has confirmed chemical weapons use through multiple investigations, marking a dangerous escalation in the conflict's methods and international legal implications.

This historical context demonstrates how the Russia-Ukraine war evolved from regional tensions to a full-scale conflict that now threatens fundamental international norms, including the prohibition on chemical weapons.

Key Issues

Proliferation

The spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction to more countries or non-state actors is a major global concern. When nations outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), like North Korea, develop nuclear or other WMD capabilities, it destabilizes regional and international security. This proliferation increases the risk of conflict and makes diplomatic efforts to prevent arms races more difficult.

Terrorism

The risk that terrorist groups could obtain chemical, biological, or radiological weapons poses a serious threat. Unlike states, terrorist groups lack formal controls or deterrents, making attacks harder to predict or prevent. Illicit trafficking and weak security in unstable areas make it easier for dangerous materials to fall into their hands, raising fears of large-scale attacks.

Arms Control and Enforcement

Treaties such as the NPT, Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) aim to control or eliminate WMDs. However, enforcing these agreements and ensuring

compliance remains challenging. Some countries may secretly continue programs or refuse inspections, weakening global arms control efforts.

Deterrence vs. Disarmament Debate

There is ongoing debate over WMDs' role in security. Supporters argue that WMDs deter war through the threat of mutual destruction, while others call for complete disarmament because of their devastating humanitarian and environmental effects. This debate shapes international policies and negotiations.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States

Department of Homeland Security(Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency - CISA)

The Department of Homeland Security is a federal department of the United States government responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the United States from a wide range of threats. Established in response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, DHS coordinates efforts to protect the country against terrorism, manage border security, enforce immigration laws, safeguard cyberspace, and respond to natural and man-made disasters.

Google

Google is a leading global technology company known for its search engine and diverse services like cloud computing, software, and hardware. In cybersecurity, Google enhances protection through its platforms, including Google Cloud, Android, and Gmail. It plays a key role in securing user data and advancing encryption standards. Google also cont

United States

- **Viewpoint:** Strongly opposes WMD proliferation. Supports nuclear deterrence for national security but promotes arms control through treaties.
- **Actions:**
 - Founding member of the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**.
 - Pressures countries like Iran and North Korea to halt WMD programs.
 - Accused of selective enforcement and retaining a large nuclear arsenal.

North Korea

- **Viewpoint:** Sees nuclear weapons as essential for regime survival and leverage in diplomacy.

- **Actions:**
 - Withdrew from the NPT (2003).
 - Conducts regular missile and nuclear tests, defying international sanctions.

United Nations (especially the IAEA and OPCW)

- **Viewpoint:** Promotes global disarmament and monitors compliance.
- **Actions:**
 - **IAEA** (International Atomic Energy Agency): Inspects nuclear programs.
 - **OPCW** (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons): Enforces the **Chemical Weapons Convention**

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Foundational Treaties & Frameworks

Year	Event/Treaty	Description
1925	Geneva Protocol	Prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons in war. One of the earliest international agreements on WMDs.
1972	Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)	Banned the development, production, and stockpiling of biological weapons.
1993	Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)	Comprehensive treaty banning chemical weapons, under the OPCW ’s implementation and verification regime.
1997	OPCW Established	The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons begins operations to enforce the CWC.

Key UN Resolutions on Chemical Weapons

Year	Resolution	Description
2004	UNSC Resolution 1540	All UN member states must prevent non-state actors from acquiring WMDs (chemical, biological, nuclear).
2013	UNSC Resolution 2118	Addressed chemical weapons use in Syria , required Syrian disarmament under OPCW supervision.

2018	UNGA Decision A/73/L.67	Strengthened OPCW's capacity to attribute chemical weapon use to specific perpetrators.
2022	UNSC Emergency Meetings on Ukraine	Multiple sessions held to address alleged use of banned weapons, but no binding resolution passed due to vetoes.

Russia–Ukraine Conflict-Related Events

Year	Event	Description
2014	Annexation of Crimea	Start of modern conflict dynamics between Russia and Ukraine. Heightened global tension around WMD use.
Feb 2022	Full-Scale Russian Invasion of Ukraine	Concerns about potential chemical weapons usage emerged from early stages.
March–May 2022	Allegations of Chemical Use	Unconfirmed reports of chemical agents in Mariupol and other cities. Ukraine called for international investigation.
April 2022	OPCW Statement on Ukraine	OPCW expressed concern and commitment to monitor any use of chemical weapons in the conflict.
2023	UNGA Resolutions Condemning Aggression	Included calls for adherence to international humanitarian law and prohibition on chemical weapons.
2024	Russia Accused of Riot Control Agents	Reports emerged about use of chloroacetophenone (a banned riot control chemical) in occupied zones.

Recent Developments in Non-Proliferation

Year	Event	Description
2023	WCO Initiative on Dual-Use Goods	The World Customs Organization expanded controls on chemical precursors and equipment export.
2024	OPCW–UN Joint Inspection Proposal	Debate over establishing independent inspections in conflict zones for chemical weapons compliance.

**2025 Ongoing UN
Investigations**

Efforts underway to verify chemical use allegations in Ukraine. Still no Security Council consensus due to P5 vetoes.

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