Chemical Weapons Destruction

1.
GOOD BYE, CHEMICAL WEAPONS
Anatoliy Gyschin
Defense and Security/Oblastnaya Gazeta
6/14/2006
(for personal use only)

INTERVIEW WITH HEAD OF KURGANSKY INFORMATION ANALYSIS CENTER ON THE PROBLEMS OF DESTRUCTION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IVAN MANILO:

According to the International convention, which was signed by 165 countries, Russia promised to liquidate arsenals of chemical agents by the 29th of April 2007.

According to the International convention, which was signed by 165 countries, our country promised to liquidate arsenals of chemical agents by the 29th of April, 2007. Though, it overestimated its possibilities, having assumed such responsibilities. In connection with this, it addressed the International community to extend the term of the agreement. Russia was given a chance. Now, the deadline when Russia has to liquidate chemical weapons is the 29th of April. Some specialists think that this term may appear to be rather strained and even unreal, as not much is done up to the present moment. Such a declaration was made by Head of Kurgansky information-analysis center on the problems of destruction of chemical weapons, candidate of engineering science, honored inventor of the Russian Federation I.I. Manilo during the international scientific-research conference concerning the questions of people's security, which took place in Yekaterinburg.

As is known, the largest in the country stores of chemical agents are not far from Central Ural. The first one is in town Schychje in Kurganskaya oblast, the other one is in town Kambarka, which is in neighboring Udmurtiya. That's why the citizens of Sverdlovskaya oblast are not indifferent concerning the fact of the destruction of potentially lethal chemical weapons.

Ivan Manilo: In Kambarka the process of their destruction has already started. A month ago, the utilization plant was introduced into service. Though, so far it's operation not at full capacity, but it is expected that in the near future it will operate at full capacity.

Question: And how are the things going on in Schychjevo?

Ivan Manilo: In Schychjevo the destruction of chemical weapons will not start soon. But development work is already taking place. There is some project documentation to build the industrial zone and disposal site (the designer of the project is Volgograd Institute "Giprosintez").

(...)

Question: During the conference concerning security problems, you declared that

Russia is unlikely to adhere to the terms of the agreement and to be on time to destroy its stores even by 2012...

Ivan Manilo: Well, there are such doubts. And this is first of all, because of the fact that the works which deal with destruction of chemical agents in our country have not been created yet. But we have no time. Since the day of signing the convention, since April of 1997, only about 1000 tons of chemical agents has been destroyed. Even if in a year we put into service everything at full capacity, as it was planned, including the resources in Schychjevo, still, six years would not be enough for us. (...)

Question: In Schychjevo there are a lot of people who are afraid of the works which are being created. They are worried about their health and ecological consequences. (...) It is considered that launching a new plant will do great harm to the genofond of people.

Ivan Manilo: (...) In my opinion, this fear is not justified. Judging from the documents, the works in Schychjevo will meet modern standards. The most dangerous operations will be carried out by machines, not by people. (...) At the present moment the documents "Groundings of investment into building of the object which will deal with chemical destruction in Schychjevo" passed state expertise. According to it, the influence of the object on the environment will be within the permitted limits. Of course, no one says that this is all safe. That's why it is paid much more than in other fields of industry. And people will have more benefits. By the way, according to the project, Schychjevo will be newly built. (...) Schychjevo will become one of the most beautiful and modern towns in Kurganskaya oblast.

Original source: Oblastnaya Gazeta (Yekaterinburg), 27 May, 2006, p.4

Return to Menu

2.
Safe gas under the Baltic
Vasily Zubkov and Viktor Litovkin
RIA Novosti
6/13/2006
(for personal use only)

In the seventh month since the launch of the North European Gas Pipeline, a joint project of Russian Gazprom and German BASF and E.ON AG, its operator is still in the center of heightened debate over the pipeline's alleged environmental hazard.

One of the major concerns is linked to Baltic dump sites of WWII chemical weapons on the pipeline's way.

Countries which are likely to lose transit fees when the pipeline carrying Siberian natural gas directly to Western consumers comes on stream are - no surprise - most vocal environmentalists. At the same time, western European powers like France, Germany, the Netherlands and others who face impending energy shortfalls are as

much concerned about maintaining their lifestyles as about keeping control of thousands of tons of Nazi war chemicals and chemical munitions, dumped in the immediate proximity.

True, balancing between the benefit from the pipeline and the risk from what may emerge from the seabed as it runs along is a difficult and pressing problem. Shortly after the WWII, the Potsdam Conference (Allied Control Council Directive #28, December 1, 1947) ruled that each of the four victorious nations - the U.S.S.R., the U.S., the U.K., and France - was responsible for the disposal of a fair share of Nazi combat agents and munitions. The Soviet Union got 70,500 tons, the U.S. - 104,500, Britain - 126,700, and France - 9,500.

Everyone disposed of the unsavoury windfalls in their own and secretive ways. Some claim the U.S. and U.K. sank barges with all their 231,000 tons near the German seaport of Kiel and in the straight of Skagerrak between Jutland and the Scandinavian Peninsula. France has left no record of its actions.

In the Soviet Union, the war chemicals were burnt, exploded on remote test sites, and recycled for civilian use. Up to 60% of all Nazi chemicals, however, were also sunk in the Baltic: 32,000 tons of bombs, projectiles, and canisters were thrown into the sea 65 miles to the southwest of Liepaja (Latvia) and to the east of the Danish island of Bornholm. The stockpile included 455,000 munitions armed with mustard and other blister gases; 10,500 adamsite dischargers, and scores of barrels of the deadly German Zyklon-B.

Mustard gas, the most lethal and powerful combat agent, made the bulk of the German stock and of the later Soviet chemical weapons, 300,000 tons of which were dumped, together with 189 tons of prussiate, in the Baltic between 1947 and 1978.

The problem is real. Nine nations and 85 million people living near the Baltic are well aware of that, and of course building anything under the sea without presenting a way to fend off the possible environmental catastrophe would be insane. However, this is just what the North European Gas Pipeline operators are doing, and quite successfully at that.

Sergei Serdyukov, Gazprom's deputy chief of gas transportation and storage operations, told RIA Novosti the Russian gas giant had perused the precise chemical dump maps inherited from East Germany, and said the pipeline drafting had involved close cooperation with the environmental watchdogs of all affected countries.

The route, Serdyukov said, was selected so as to avoid high-risk areas - which are well known and included in all sea maps - well before the pipeline project won political support. Near Bornholm, Gazprom's sonar survey found a two-km wide shelf which is very convenient for the pipe, just 200 m deep, and runs far enough from the dump sites. "We have surveyed every centimeter of the bottom where the pipeline is going to run and selected a 170-m corridor, broad enough to lay two pipes," Serdyukov said.

"Almost all WWII chemical munitions already pose an environmental danger. Most of the metal and rubber canisters are nearly etched through by salty water. The heavy mustard gas jelly concentrates at the bottom, and is dragged elsewhere by deepwater

streams.

"Such nomad jelly clouds are going to be fairly dangerous when Gazprom drills test construction wells there. You cannot possibly predict how drilling machines will operate in such environment. It is comforting, though, that part of the stockpile has died out, and all the munitions had been dumped without fuses."

Professor Natalia Kalinina, Russia's leading chemical weapons experts, corroborates that the jelly layer resulting from decades of underwater storage protects the sea from the impact of combat agents, though who knows what will emerge if this layer is disturbed by construction.

"Don't go asking for trouble," she warns.

The trouble may emerge without a pipeline as well, because the Danish straights of Kattegat and Skagerrak are a major marine thoroughfare in the Baltic, a gateway to the Atlantic for 2,000 vessels per day. Moreover, the trouble is not alone: the WWII has left many unexploded torpedoes, mines, and other munitions. Serdyukov says there are places where you cannot see the bottom under piles of old ammunition. Construction parties mainly clear them out but in some more dangerous cases have to apply to adjacent governments for explosive ordnance disposal.

Curiously, another problem is fishermen and - yes - fish. Anything unusual on the seabed attracts both, which is a problem Gazprom did not encounter during the construction of the Russian-Turkish Blue Stream gas pipeline under the Black Sea, where the life layer is limited to several hundred meters. Nonetheless, Serdyukov said, Gazprom is going to capitalize on the experience of that fast and successful enterprise.

The Baltic pipeline will be laid under unprecedented environmental safety standards: the steel pipe (Off Shore Standard DNV-05-F-101 Submarine Pipeline Systems/Gl/Rules Subsea Pipelines and Risers) shielded by three layers of bitumen and enamel will be put into a concrete cover which will provide mechanical protection, while compensating for natural buoyancy.

Environmental safety as well as economic viability of the North European Gas Pipeline will be additionally verified by international auditor Veritas Group. The Russian and German partners are united in their awareness of the environmental challenges and in their commitment to overcoming them and delivering safe and reliable gas supplies to consumers across Western Europe.

Return to Menu