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## Military Strategy

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# General Copel warns of chemical weapons

by Laurent Rosenfeld

*Vaincre la guerre (To Defeat War)* by Gen. Étienne Copel was catapulted into public attention when its author, the deputy chief of staff of the French Air Force, resigned on March 10 over disagreements with the present strategic policy of the government. The resignation, timed with the publication of the book, dropped a bombshell into French strategic thinking. General Copel also addressed the Fusion Energy Foundation conference on beam defense in Paris March 23.

The book starts with an argument which is not new in French military circles: The French doctrine of deterrence does not work in the present situation. Or, more precisely, nuclear weapons may deter the enemy from using his own nuclear weapons, but not much more. The basic idea is that if your adversary is pointing the tip of his bayonet at your chest, a 16-inch cannon will not help you very much.

Should the Soviets attack Western Europe with conventional forces, and, more specifically, chemical weapons, it seems unlikely that either the French or the American President will dare to go for a massive anti-city strike, because it would call forth immediate Soviet retaliations at the same level. France, at the same time, cannot accept the insane doctrine of flexible response, because even if it were not dangerous per se, it could be workable only if France or the Western alliance had an outstanding superiority at one of the levels of the graduated escalation provided by the doctrine, which is obviously not the case.

General Copel further asserts that the Soviets cannot really afford to launch a pre-emptive first strike, because the operation is extremely complex and the danger of failure too large. At the same time, however, given the Soviets' present war economy and the social, political, and religious unrest in the Soviet sphere of influence, whether in the so-called "captive nations" or in the Soviet Union itself, the Soviets might find themselves in a situation where they would feel forced to trigger a war against the West.

But how would they attack? A nuclear first strike being, in Copel's mind, too hazardous, the Soviet will strike in the area where they have the greatest margin of superiority. While the Soviets have a clear margin of superiority in terms of conventional forces, *the Soviets have an overwhelming superiority in terms of chemical warfare.* The Soviets were trained in chemical warfare by German chemists (the most advanced in the world in this area) before World War II, and grabbed the Nazi Germany poison gas inventories (and chemists) at the end of that war. They have been producing thousands of tons of poison gas per month, and currently have an inventory estimated to be at least 300,000 tons, i.e., 10 times larger than the United States and a hundred times larger than Western Europe.

A few milligrams of a neurotoxic called VX on the skin for two minutes is enough to kill a person. Modern toxins (i.e., poisons extracted from living organisms) are even more dangerous, in some cases lethal at doses 100 to 1,000 times smaller. (One ton is equivalent to a billion milligrams; if properly distributed, the present Soviet stock would thus be sufficient to kill mankind 50,000 to 100,000 times, or more.)

According to General Copel, the Soviets have already used those gases, either directly (in Afghanistan), or by proxy (Laos and Vietnam). One case at least is well documented: the "acid rain" used in Laos and in Afghanistan (and used more recently by Iran in Kurdistan), which chemical analysis performed in the United States revealed to be a mycotoxin (a toxin extracted from a mushroom) called trichotecen.

### Soviet chemical superiority

The Soviet artillery, tanks, and aircraft are all chemical-capable. Each unit of the Red Army, from the division down to the battalion and the company, has groups specialized in chemical warfare. Overall, at least 100,000 troops are exclusively deployed for chemical warfare. And, according to the best sources available, one-quarter of all Soviet artillery shells and missile warheads are chemical.

In the face of this danger, General Copel calls for various reorganization measures. Among others, he proposes:

- The creation of Western anti-chemical defensive capabilities (able to protect both civilian populations and military personnel), as well as offensive chemical capabilities eventually able to deter the Soviets from using these superlethal weapons.
- The deployment of various types of cruise missiles, in order to cope with the possible vulnerability of ballistic missiles.
- A full anti-blitzkrieg posture, including specifically the deployment in Europe of the neutron bomb, the only weapon able to "saturate" a tank offensive.

The subject deserves attention, and not only in France.