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REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHEMICAL WEAPONS: A MIDDLE EAST AND THE EU COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

Chemical weapons constitute one of the most severe threats to international security, comprehensively prohibited by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Nevertheless, significant regional variations exist in their application: the Middle East regularly employs chemical weapons in armed conflicts, while their use in Europe is practically considered forbidden. This study examines the regional differences through a comparative analysis framework, applying three theoretical perspectives: democratic peace theory, weak state theory, and theories of norm diffusion and erosion. The research employs qualitative comparative methodology, case study analysis (Iraq 1988, Syria 2013, Salisbury 2018), and secondary source synthesis. Findings indicate that institutional strength, democratic accountability, legal framework effectiveness, and international norm internalization are determining factors in restraining chemical weapons application. The study concludes with policy recommendations for the international community.

KEYWORDS: chemical weapons, norm erosion, Middle East, EU, comparative analysis

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1. Introduction

One of the most alarming international security challenges of the 21st century is the continued application of chemical weapons in certain regions, particularly the Middle East, while their use in the EU is practically treated as proscription. This regional asymmetry represents more than merely a military-strategic phenomenon: it reflects deeper structural, institutional, and normative differences between the two regions.

The August 21, 2013 Ghouta chemical attack, which caused approximately 1000 deaths in Syria (Rodriguez-Llanes et al., 2018), and the March 4, 2018 Salisbury Novichok attack illustrate this regional contrast well. While Syria witnessed massive, repetitive, and systematic application of chemical weapons against civilian populations, in Europe such incidents are confined to targeted, isolated political assassinations that trigger immediate and forceful international condemnation.

This study's central research question is: What structural, institutional, and normative factors explain the regional differences in chemical weapons application between the Middle East and the EU?

For conceptual clarity and terminological consistency, this study explicitly defines its comparative scope at the outset: "Europe" refers precisely to the European Union as a political partnership of member states, plus associated EEA countries (e.g., Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein) and key Western European

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NATO allies like the United Kingdom – regions unified by robust democratic institutions, rule of law, comprehensive OPCW backing, and deep norm internalization against chemical weapons use. This deliberate scope excludes broader geographic or cultural notions of Europe, as well as Eastern European theaters like Ukraine, to maintain focus on consolidated democracies contrasting Middle Eastern weak states; any references to US involvement (e.g., in 1980s Iraq support or transatlantic sanctions coordination) will hereafter specify "Western world" cooperation rather than subsuming it under "Europe". Such precision enables rigorous most-different-systems comparison, distinguishing isolated, externally driven incidents (e.g., Salisbury 2018 targeted assassination) from systematic regime applications in Iraq 1988 or Syria 2013, while ensuring the EU's political partnership framing avoids generic geographic overgeneralization.

The research builds on three main theoretical perspectives. Democratic Peace Theory (Russett, 1995) posits that democratic states are less likely to engage in armed conflict with one another and generally demonstrate greater support for arms control agreements. The structural explanation suggests that government accountability to citizens increases support for arms control, as public opinion favors international cooperation over unilateral armament. Weak State Theory characterizes many Middle Eastern states by low central government capacity, absence of violence monopoly, and insufficient provision of basic public services (Larsson, 2005); in such states, chemical weapons application is facilitated by institutional control deficiency and insufficient legal norm enforcement. Norm Diffusion and Erosion Theory (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) explains that international norms follow a lifecycle model: they emerge, spread, institutionalize, or erode. The prohibition norm against chemical weapons historically achieved strong status, yet repeated violations during the Syrian conflict have questioned this norm's strength, yet according to some experts the prohibition norm has not significantly eroded because third-party reactions remain strong (Haviland, 2021).

This study employs qualitative comparative methodology, enabling systematic analysis of similarities and differences among political phenomena (Lijphart, 1971). Case selection follows "most different systems design" logic: Syria (2013, Ghouta attack), Iraq (1988, Halabja), and Salisbury (2018, Skripal incident) where the dependent variable (chemical weapons application extent) varies while independent variables (institutional structure, democratic level, norm complexity) are examined across cases. Structured, focused comparison examines identical questions across each case: institutional capacity, democratic control, legal enforcement effectiveness, and international response nature. The research integrates secondary source analysis including Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) reports, UN investigations, Human Rights Watch documents, and peer-reviewed scholarly literature, alongside process tracing that reconstructs decision-making processes regarding chemical weapons application to reveal causal mechanisms through which structural and institutional factors operate.

The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 1 describes the methodology, Chapter 2 examines chemical weapons application causes in the Middle East across three dimensions: institutional weakness, political instability, and international legal norm enforcement problems. Chapter 3 analyzes mechanisms of prohibition establishment and maintenance in the EU. Chapter 4 provides systematic comparison between regions. The conclusion (Section 5) synthesizes findings and presents policy recommendations.

2. Chemical Weapons Application in the Middle East: Institutional Weakness and Political Instability

Numerous Middle Eastern states meet "weak state" criteria, characterized by low central government capacity, absence of violence monopoly, and insufficient basic services. Regional states exhibit varying degrees of state weakness (Kamrava, 2016): Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen experience state failure, while others show "quasi-strong" status with internal fractures. This institutional weakness enables chemical weapons application through multiple mechanisms. The boundary between civilian chemistry and military chemical capacity is frequently blurred, with weak institutional oversight enabling chemical precursor and technology diversion to non-state actors. UN SC Resolution 1540 (United Nations Security Council, 2004) mandates states establish chemical security legal frameworks, yet Middle Eastern enforcement remains inadequate. Regional chemical facilities often lack adequate monitoring and reporting systems, enabling dual-use material diversion. Libya exemplifies this problem: in the 1980s, it produced limited chemical weapons and deployed them against Chadian forces in 1987; the Rabta industrial complex Libya's chemical weapons program cornerstone, manufactured mustard gas, sarin, and phosgene from the late 1980's (NTI, 2015), and although Gaddafi accepted CWC accession in 2003, the interim period's weak institutional control endangered safe storage.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) constituted one of modern history's longest and deadliest conflicts (Britannica, 2025), with the Iraqi military systematically deploying chemical weapons against Iranian troops and civilian populations. Multiple countries' companies assisted Iraq's chemical weapons program development, including the United States, West Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and France (Shenon, 2002). Over 350 major chemical attacks occurred across border regions, with approximately 100,000 Iranian casualties and 7,500 direct deaths from chemical attacks (Tehran Peace Museum, n.d.). Significant attacks included August 1983 Haj Umran (mustard gas), February-March 1984 Majnoon Islands (2,500 casualties), (Razavi et al., 2014), February 1986 Al-Faw (8,000-10,000 casualties), June 1987 Sardasht (8,000-10,000 civilians affected), (Central Intelligence Agency, 2002) and March 1988 Halabja (5,000 dead, thousands of injured) (Human Rights Watch, 1993).

The Halabja attack occurred on March 16, 1988, constituting one of the 20th century's deadliest attacks against civilians, demonstrated how authoritarian regimes exploit institutional vacuums. Detailed analysis reveals that, although lacking direct evidence of Saddam Hussein's explicit order, a command environment clearly emerged where indiscriminate gassing of Iraqi Kurds appeared permissible and even desirable. The attack's long-term health consequences proved severe, with epidemiological research identifying elevated cancer rates, congenital abnormalities, and chronic respiratory disease (Palkki & Rubin, 2021).

Syria's 2011 civil war initiation marked systematic prohibition norm violation. Human Rights Watch's 2017 report characterizes Syrian government chemical weapons use as "widespread and systematic", potentially constituting crimes against humanity. The Ghouta attack (August 21, 2013) revealed by United Nations Mission investigation, was a "clear and convincing evidence" of sarin nerve agent use via surface-to-surface rockets, causing approximately 1117 deaths (Ekzayez et al., 2019) and more than 3,600 injuries (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2013). The April 4, 2017 Khan Shaykhun attack demonstrated Syrian government responsibility: OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism procedure determined used sarin derived from Syrian

government stockpiles (United Nations Security Council, 2017), containing marker compounds characteristic of Syrian-origin DF (difluor). The April 7, 2018 Douma attack involved Syrian air force helicopters dropping yellow cylinders containing chlorine gas; OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team's January 2023 report established "reasonable grounds to believe" that Syrian government-controlled helicopters conducted the attack (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 2023). Non-state actor chemical weapons use compounds these challenges: ISIS/Daesh deployed mustard gas in Iraq and Syria, and OPCW's 2024 report first officially determined Daesh responsibility for a September 1, 2015 Marea city attack involving sulfur mustard artillery deployment (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 2024).

International norm enforcement faces multiple Middle East obstacles. Weak 1980's international response to Iraqi chemical attacks – when both the United States and Soviet Union supported Iraq against Iranian influence – contributed to regional norm weakening, as the Reagan administration knew Iraqi materials would develop chemical weapons. During the Syrian conflict, the UN Security Council failed achieving consensus on accountability as Russia and China repeatedly vetoed sanctions-related resolutions; between February 2017 and April 2020, Russia vetoed 16 Syria-related SC resolutions, limiting effective sanctions and accountability options (Jaber, 2020). Although Syria joined the CWC in 2013 and declared chemical stockpiles, OPCW monitoring remained limited; despite 2014 disarmament, post-2015 chemical attacks occurred, indicating declaration deficiencies and enforcement weakness. A scientific analysis reveals that although chemical weapons' military utility remains limited in Syrian conflict – proving neither decisively effective tactically nor as civilian victimization tools – the regime continued application, suggesting that political messaging, terror and psychological warfare, and symbolic power demonstration comprise additional motivation factors (Chapmanet al, 2018). Institutional weakness, corruption, civil-military control absence, and legal enforcement inadequacy create structural chemical weapons application opportunity in the Middle East.

3. The Prohibition Norm in the EU: Democratic Institutions and Legal Frameworks

The EU's political systems feature stable democratic institutions, rule of law, and high-level government accountability. Democratic peace theory suggests these institutions reduce armed conflict probability and increase arms control treaty support (Risse, 2025). In democratic states, executive decisions face legislative, judicial, media, and civil society scrutiny. This complicates chemical weapons' covert development, production, or application. EU member states maintain strict export controls and dual-use regulations. Parliamentary oversight provides transparency and accountability, independent courts review government decisions contradicting constitutional or international legal norms, and free media continuously reports security matters, complicating secret program operation. Public opinion strongly condemns chemical weapons: one research using list experiment methodology revealed 10-17% of Americans misrepresent chemical weapons preferences when directly questioned, indicating societal pressure and norms (Blair, Chu & Schwartz, 2022). Civil society organizations (CSO) play critical roles maintaining and reinforcing prohibition norms; the Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition (CWCC, 2025) actively promotes CWC universality and norm internalization. CSO functions include advocacy through campaigns and lobbying, monitoring and

reporting of CWC implementation, and education and awareness-raising regarding chemical weapons dangers (Sandhu, 2014).

European Union's legal infrastructure provides extensive and effective chemical weapons controls. EU Regulation 2021/821 establishes comprehensive dual-use items export control systems, aiming to contribute to international peace and security while preventing weapons of mass destruction proliferation; key elements include a common EU control list integrating multilateral export control regime lists (Australia Group, Wassenaar Arrangement, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Missile Technology Control Regime), catch-all controls applying to unscheduled items applicable to weapons development, and broker/technical assistance controls regulating dual-use items-related activities (European Commission, 2025). Exporters must establish internal compliance programs, with authorization types including individual export licenses, general export licenses, EU General Export Authorizations, and national general export authorizations.

The OPCW verification system provides comprehensive CWC compliance monitoring encompassing routine inspections – including 24/7 physical presence at chemical weapons destruction facilities with CCTV cameras and real-time process parameter monitoring. It includes regular inspections of Schedule 1, 2, 3 compound producing/processing plants, and declaration accuracy verification at other chemical production facilities – and challenge inspections enabling any state party requesting investigation in another state party's territory when suspecting treaty violation (Kelle, 1997). Although no challenge inspections have occurred, the mechanism serves as deterrent.

The EU provides continuous financial and technical support to OPCW exemplified by €5.35 million in 2023 and a further substantial contribution of €4.45 million in December 2025 to strengthen OPCW missions, including Syria's chemical weapons dismantlement efforts (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 2023; Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons 2025). The EU established in 2018 a horizontal sanctions regime against chemical weapons application, enabling targeted sanctions (travel bans, asset freezes) against persons and entities using or developing chemical weapons regardless of violation location; the regime aims deterrence and prevention, accountability, and norm reinforcement (Council of the European Union, 2018). OPCW-verified instances of CS gas deployment in Ukraine during 2024-2025 (via three Technical Assistance Visits) underscore its prohibition under the CWC when used in warfare (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons 2024a, 2025a, 2025b). These cases refine the European norm portrayal as involving isolated, non-systematic incidents typically linked to external aggressors like Russia, in sharp contrast to the Middle East's patterns of widespread, regime-driven application.

The EU's prohibition norms root in World War I horrors. The Ypres battle (1915) and chemical warfare's general experience created profound trauma, becoming multi-generational collective memory. In the EU, the prohibition norm transcends mere legal rule, representing socially internalized value; educational systems, media, and political discourse continuously reinforce this norm, shaping generational attitudes through historical memory of World War I veterans' accounts, monuments, museums, education (school curricula teaching chemical weapons dangers), political discourse (chemical weapons opposition constituting political consensus), and critical media, condemning tone regarding any chemical weapons application (Zanders, 2019).

Although the EU treats chemical weapons military application as prohibition

norm, targeted political assassinations occur: on March 4, 2018, former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and daughter Yulia faced novichok nerve agent attack in Salisbury; SIPRI (2019) reports Britain determined applied nerve agent belonged to novichok family, with perpetrators Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov (GRU officers) placing novichok on the Skripal house door handle, and victims including Sergei and Yulia Skripal (survived) and Dawn Sturgess (died July 2018). British military's longest domestic deployment followed decontamination (Collins, 2019), and twenty-eight countries expelled 153 Russian diplomats, demonstrating collective action effectiveness (CNBC, 2018). Military lessons included Novichok's long-term environmental persistence, extraordinary decontamination expense and time-consumption, civil health system chemical agent incident preparation necessity, and chemical agent identification requiring specialized laboratory capacity (Collins, 2019). In August 2020, Russian opposition politician Aleksei Navalny faced novichok poisoning; OPCW confirmed novichok presence, triggering international condemnation and additional Russian sanctions (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 2020).

These cases demonstrate that although taboo is not absolute – authoritarian states (particularly Russia) still employ chemical agents for targeted political assassinations – immediate and forceful international condemnation follows, responses strengthen norm power and provide deterrent effect, and European incidents represent isolated targeted attacks contrasting Middle Eastern mass application.

4. Comparative Analysis: Middle East vs. the EU

Institutional capacity and democratic control reveal stark regional contrasts. Numerous Middle East states exhibit weak, fragmented, corrupt state capacity; limited/absent democratic control and parliamentary oversight; limited civil-military oversight with military dominance; weak, selective, politically influenced legal enforcement; and limited, censored media freedom with weak, oppressed civil society (Kamrava, 2016). The EU demonstrates strong, efficient, transparent state capacity; strong democratic governance and multiparty systems; strong parliamentary committees and public hearings; strong civil control and professional military; consistent, effective, independent court legal enforcement; and free, independent, investigative media with strong, active, pluralist civil society. Democratic peace theory effectively explains the EU's prohibition norm stability (Altman, Rojas-de-Galarreta & Urdinez, 2021) democratic institutions, accountability, and checks-and-balances mechanisms reduce chemical weapons application political rationality (Adachi, 2012).

International norms effectiveness differs significantly. The examined Middle East region exhibits weak normalization internalization through instrumental approaches; late/conditional CWC accession; geopolitical bloc obstruction of sanctions enforcement; limited OPCW access with partial cooperation; weak, restricted civil society advocacy; and fragmented international coordination amid interest conflicts (CIRS Georgetown, 2014). The EU demonstrates strong normalization internalization with identity connections; early, comprehensive CWC accession; rapid, unified, coordinated sanctions enforcement; full OPCW cooperation with transparent declarations (OPCW, 2024); strong, active civil society monitoring and campaigns (Ghionis, 2023); and unified, values-based international coordination.

Price (2019) argues the prohibition norm has not significantly globally eroded because third-party reactions remain strong, though regional erosion variation exists: Middle East enforcement remains weaker

while the EU's remains strong. Middle Eastern explanations include norm non-integration into state identity, instrumental cost-benefit rule application, weak societal internalization, and missing institutional norm enforcement capacities, whereas European factors encompass norm integration as part of European identity, logic of appropriateness making chemical weapons use "unthinkable", multi-generational societal internalization, and strong institutional and legal enforcement capacities.

Conflict intensity and chemical weapons rationality demonstrate further divergence (see Table no. 1). Some Middle East region experiences protracted civil wars and ethno-religious conflicts with continuous, persistent instability where chemical weapons provide tactical advantage against poorly equipped opponents and where delayed, fragmented, politically compromised international responses occur. The EU faces brief, targeted, alliance-framed conflicts with rare incidents and alliance systems stabilizing effects where chemical weapons offer no strategic advantage against modern militaries and immediate, unified, strong sanctions follow. Chapman et al. (2018) analysis concludes chemical weapons' military utility remains limited in Syrian conflict, yet the regime continued application, suggesting political messaging, terror and psychological warfare, and symbolic power demonstration comprise additional motivation factors.

In the EU, conflict absence, alliance systems (NATO, EU) stability, and multilateral conflict management mechanisms reduce chemical weapons deployment motivation; NATO collective defence guarantees (Article 5) and EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) provide institutional frameworks preventing and managing conflicts.

Table no. 1

Conflict Intensity and Chemical Weapons "Rationality"

Dimension	Middle East	the EU
Conflict type	Protracted civil wars, ethno-religious conflicts	Brief, targeted, alliance-framed
Conflict frequency	Continuous, persistent instability	Rare, alliance systems stabilize
Military rationality	Chemical weapons provide tactical advantage against poorly equipped opponents	Chemical weapons offer no strategic advantage against modern militaries
Psychological warfare	Chemical weapons terror tools, force civil displacement	Chemical attack political costs exceed utility
International response	Delayed, fragmented, politically compromised	Immediate, unified, strong sanctions

(Source: Author's compilation)

Geopolitical environment and international responses reveal fundamental differences (see Table no. 2). The Middle East experiences intense geopolitical competition (USA, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) with weak regional organizations (Arab League) where UN SC dynamics involve vetoes and blockade, producing fragmented international response weakening the prohibition norm. Europe demonstrates lower great power competition with transatlantic cooperation, strong regional organizations (EU, NATO) where UN SC shows relative consensus on European matters, and unified, values-based coalitions enabling effective, multilevel (EU, national, OPCW) sanctions mechanisms.

During the Syrian conflict, the UN Security Council faced frequent

obstruction: between February 2017 and April 2020, Russia vetoed 16 Syria-related SC resolutions, limiting effective sanctions and accountability options (Security Council Report, 2025). Geopolitical competition includes Russia's Syria support and military presence, Iran's Assad regime alliance with military advisors, Turkey's Northern Syria intervention and anti-Kurdish operations, USA and allies' anti-ISIS coalition with limited intervention, and Saudi Arabia and Gulf states' rebel group support. This complexity produced fragmented international response weakening regional prohibition norm. In Europe, the EU and NATO close cooperation grounded in shared values and institutional frameworks enables rapid, coordinated responses: after Salisbury, 28 countries expelled 153 Russian diplomats, demonstrating collective action effectiveness (UK Government, 2018). European collective response elements include diplomatic coordination (EU foreign ministers council, rapid decision-making), sanctions coordination (unified EU sanctions lists), intelligence-sharing (NATO and EU intelligence cooperation), and legal cooperation (European Public Prosecutor, Europol).

Table no. 2

Geopolitical Environment and International Responses

Dimension	Middle East	the EU
Conflict type	Protracted civil wars, ethno-religious conflicts	Brief, targeted, alliance-framed
Conflict frequency	Continuous, persistent instability	Rare, alliance systems stabilize
Military rationality	Chemical weapons provide tactical advantage against poorly equipped opponents	Chemical weapons offer no strategic advantage against modern militaries
Psychological warfare	Chemical weapons terror tools, force civil displacement	Chemical attack political costs exceed utility
International response	Delayed, fragmented, politically compromised	Immediate, unified, strong sanctions

(Source: Author's compilation)

5. Conclusions

This study employs comparative political analysis examining regional chemical weapons application differences between Middle East and the EU (see Table no. 3), reaching three primary conclusions.

First, institutional capacity and democratic control comprise determining factors: weak state theory demonstrates explanatory power regarding Middle East cases, as institutional weakness, corruption, civil-military control absence, and legal enforcement inadequacy create structural chemical weapons application opportunity; Iran-Iraq War and Syrian civil war cases illustrate how authoritarian regimes exploit institutional vacuums deploying chemical weapons against own populations. Conversely, Europe's strong democratic institutions, accountability, and transparency function as restraining forces; parliamentary oversight, independent courts, free media, and active civil society jointly create environments where chemical weapons development or application proves politically costly and practically impossible.

Second, norm adherence and internalization depth differ fundamentally: the prohibition norm maintains strong historical European status through multi-generational societal internalization, with World War I traumatic experience deeply embedded in European collective memory, continuously reproduced through societal-political discourse, education, and cultural

representation. Middle Eastern norm weakness stems partly from geopolitical fragmentation and partly from authoritarian regime norm-violating behavior, with insufficient 1980s international condemnation (Iran-Iraq War) contributing to regional norm erosion.

Third, geopolitical environment and collective action capacity prove crucial: fragmented international community responses in Middle East (particularly Syria case) weaken the prohibition norm, with UN Security Council obstruction, great power interest conflicts, and double-standard application all contributing to norm erosion. In Europe, rapid, forceful, collective responses (Salisbury) reinforce the norm and provide deterrent effect: EU and NATO institutional frameworks enable coordinated diplomatic, legal, and economic responses demonstrating norm strength.

Table no. 3

Comprehensive Comparative Table of Middle -East and Europe chemical weapon activities

Factor	Middle East	the EU	Impact on Chemical Weapons Application
State capacity	Weak	Strong	Weak states cannot prevent proliferation
Democracy	Authoritarian	Democratic	Democratic control restrains use
Civil society	Oppressed	Active	Civil monitoring increases transparency
Conflict intensity	High, protracted	Low	Protracted conflicts increase application motivation
OPCW monitoring	Limited	Full	Effective monitoring reduces violations
Geopolitics	Fragmented	Cohesive	Fragmentation weakens international response
Norm internalization	Weak	Strong	Strong internalization functions as taboo
Sanctions	Weak enforcement	Strong enforcement	Effective sanctions deter violators

(Source: Author's compilation)

This research has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The relatively small number of cases analyzed, including Iraq 1988, Syria 2013, and Salisbury 2018, restricts the extent to which these results can be generalized to other contexts, as these cases may reflect specific regional or situational dynamics rather than universal trends. Additionally, the qualitative comparative methodology used allows for detailed examination of causal mechanisms but does not permit statistical verification or definitive causal attribution, limiting the ability to quantify the influence of the identified structural, institutional, and normative factors. Furthermore, the study's temporal focus on recent 21st-century cases may exclude important historical developments and future changes, particularly in light of technological advances, evolving geopolitical factors, and the changing roles of non-state actors, which may alter the patterns of chemical weapons use and normative adherence.

These findings yield several targeted policy recommendations for the international community, directly addressing the identified structural, institutional, and normative gaps. To counter institutional weakness in the

Middle East, the EU should lead targeted capacity-building initiatives, including dedicated funding for OPCW Technical Assistance Visits to monitor hybrid chemical threats, alongside technical transfers of EU Regulation 2021/821 best practices to strengthen regional National Authorities' dual-use chemical export controls and CWC implementation legislation. Geopolitical consensus demands a formalized P5 "no-veto" protocol within the UN Security Council for chemical weapons-critical resolutions, modelled on Syria cases to ensure consistent condemnation irrespective of alliances, while institutionalizing OPCW Investigation and Identification Team mandates through automatic referral mechanisms to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes prosecution. Complementing this, EU member states should adopt a mandatory "CW-response playbook" based on the Salisbury 2018 model – encompassing coordinated diplomatic expulsions, asset freezes, and sanctions within 48 hours of verified incidents – to enhance deterrence and normative reinforcement across the continent. Norm diffusion efforts should prioritize sustained financing for civil society organizations to preserve victim testimonies through media campaigns and educational programs in fragile states, while disseminating European verification experiences to foster regional integration mechanisms modelled on EU structures. This integrated framework not only aligns with the study's theoretical foundations – democratic peace theory, weak state theory, and norm diffusion dynamics – but also offers practical, actionable contributions to ongoing OPCW and EU policy dialogues.

Future research necessity exists examining norm erosion longitudinally, non-state actor chemical capacity and prevention strategies, technological development impacts on verification systems, cognitive and psychological decision-maker factors, and quantitative large-N studies exploring chemistry weapons application-determining factors through regression modelling. Chemical weapons application regional differences indicate deeper international system structural and normative problems; resolution demands holistic approaches integrating institutional, legal, political, social, and technological dimensions.

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