

CHEMICAL WARFARE - IRAN IRAQ WAR:

The allegation that Iraq had used chemical weapons in this war was the subject of a question to the Foreign Minister (Hansard, House of Representatives, 6 March 1984). Mr. Hayden replied:

IRAN-IRAQ CONFLICT

Mr MILTON Has the Minister for Foreign Affairs noted allegations of Iraqi use of chemical warfare in the Iran-Iraq conflict? Is there any evidence to substantiate these claims? Does Australia propose any initiatives in respect of these very serious allegations?

Mr HAYDEN Australian experts have had an opportunity to examine the Iranian claims and supporting documentation. The conclusion is that there is a substantial basis in fact to the allegations. Honourable members may be interested to know that on Friday 15 wounded Iranian soldiers were flown into Vienna for medical treatment of a specialist kind. They were discovered to be suffering severe pain and severe injuries to the face, mouth and nose. Superficially the injuries appeared to be consistent with severe burning. However, on examination it was established that burning did not cause the injuries, that they were, in fact, consistent with exposure to some sort of chemical substance. The conclusion seems to be that mustard gas has been used in the course of this conflict. This is a very disturbing development. It adds a new dimension to the nature of that conflict and adds, in a very worrying way, to instability in the region.

If Iraq were to increase the production of this form of chemical substance for warfare purposes and were it to supply it to other countries in the region, one could readily apprehend the sort of tension that would contribute and one could also anticipate the likelihood of a pre-emptive strike being adopted by some country feeling somewhat exposed and in danger as a result of those developments.

The Government believes there is a need for a continued effort on the part of the international community to ensure that all reports of chemical warfare are promptly and thoroughly investigated. The Government supports the 1982 and 1983 United Nations General Assembly resolutions to this effect and has nominated the Materials Research Laboratories of the Department of Defence for inclusion in the list compiled by the Secretary-General to assist him in the investigation of such reports. The 1982 General Assembly also adopted a resolution, which Australia co-sponsored, calling for the strict observance by all states of the principles and objectives of the 1925 Geneva protocol which prohibits the use in war of chemical and bacteriological methods of warfare.

Accordingly, today I will be instructing our Ambassador in Baghdad to take up the matter with the Iraqi authorities. I will also be instructing

our Ambassador in New York to discuss the matter with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to urge the Secretary-General to take action, pursuant to the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, to investigate the reports. The Australian Government believes the situation calls for a full, impartial and independent investigation by the United Nations, and to that end will support whatever proper initiatives may be initiated at the United Nations and elsewhere. The Australian Government opposes the manufacturing and stockpiling of chemical warfare agents and seeks a global prohibition against either manufacture or stockpiling of such agents. We intend to work unremittingly towards that end.

CHEMICAL WARFARE:

An Australian, Dr. Peter Dunn of the Department of Defence Materials Research Laboratories in Melbourne, was appointed a member of a UN investigation team which found chemical weapons had been used in the Iran Iraqi war. In announcing the appointment, the Foreign Minister Mr. W. Hayden, indicated Australian government policy on this question. A statement on 13 March indicated:

"..... on his instructions Australia had taken the lead early last week in urging the UN Secretary-General to take such action when it became clear that there was a substantial basis to the reports. Mr. Hayden welcomed the prompt response of the Secretary-General who had assembled a team of experts from several countries as part of a personal humanitarian initiative. The team was expected to leave for Iran shortly. Mr. Hayden said that the Government was gravely concerned that the proliferation of such weapons could further endanger the stability of the region.

He was even more concerned about reports for the possibility that more lethal substances such as nerve gas could be introduced into the conflict. These events demonstrated that the Government was right to give priority to all matters of arms control. It reinforced Australia's belief that a complete ban on the manufacture, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons could no longer be delayed. Australia will pursue this aim as vigorously as possible. Mr. Hayden said that the Australian Government believed there was a need for a continued effort on the part of the international community to ensure that all reports of chemical warfare were promptly and thoroughly investigated. Because of this the Australian Government had already nominated the Materials Research Laboratory for inclusion in the list compiled by the Secretary-General to assist in the investigation of any reports of the use of chemical weapons."

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

The following is an edited and paraphrased extract from the experts' report to the UN Secretary General on the use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war. Copies of the report are available from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

INTRODUCTION

On 3 November 1983, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran alleged in a communication to the United Nations that chemical weapons were being used by Iraq. The reference to such weapons was made in the context of reiterating a request, made initially on 28 October 1983, that the Secretary-General should send a mission to the area to ascertain damages to civilian targets. (A previous mission, dispatched by the Secretary-General at the request of Iran and with the concurrence of Iraq, visited the area from 20 May to 2 June 1983.)

In accordance with the procedure used for the dispatch of the first mission, the Secretary-General consulted Iraq on Iran's request. Iraq indicated that the Security Council had, on 31 October 1983, adopted a resolution which condemned violations of international humanitarian law and called for the immediate cessation of all military operations against civilian targets. By that resolution, the Council had requested the Secretary-General to continue his mediation efforts. The position of Iraq was that the Council's resolution should be implemented in an integrated manner.

In the circumstances, and mindful of the concerns expressed by the two parties, the Secretary-General proposed that a mission be sent to the area to ascertain the positions of the parties on the issues of the conflict and to examine the damages to civilian targets, including the determination of the type of munitions that might have been used.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reiterated allegations of the use of chemical weapons on a number of occasions. Press reports indicated that the medical authorities in a number of countries in which Iranian nationals were being treated had not excluded the possibility that chemical weapons had been used. Those reports were accompanied by a growing call by Governments, as well as by public and private organisations, for an objective and impartial investigation.

Conscious of the humanitarian principles embodied in the Charter and of the moral responsibilities vested in his office, the Secretary-General felt duty-bound to ascertain the facts and, to that end, requested four eminent specialists in their respective fields to undertake a fact-finding visit to Iran. Those specialists are:

Dr Gustav Andersson, Ph.D.
Senior Research Chemist,
National Defence Research Institute,
Sweden

Dr Manuel Dominguez,
Colonel, Army Medical Corps,
Professor of Preventive Medicine,
Universidad Complutense de Madrid,
Spain

Dr Peter Dunn, D.Sc., B.Sc., (Hons), FRACI
Superintending Scientist,
Materials Research Laboratories,
Department of Defence,
Melbourne, Australia

Colonel Ulrich Imobersteg, Dr. phil, chem.
Chief, NBC Defence Division,
Ministry of Defence,
Switzerland

The specialists travelled to Teheran on 13 March and returned on 19 March 1984. They were accompanied by Mr Iqbal Riza, Principal Officer in the Office of the Under-Secretaries-General for Special Political Affairs, who assisted them in the organisation of their work and ensured liaison with the competent authorities. The specialists submitted a joint report to the Secretary-General on 21 March 1984.

The Secretary-General placed on record his deep appreciation for the dedicated manner in which the specialists discharged their assignment despite constraints in time and resources, and under difficult and hazardous conditions.

In the light of the spirit of humanitarian concern which guided his decision to undertake the investigation, the Secretary-General, in transmitting the report of the specialists to the Security Council for its information, deplored the fact that their unanimous conclusions substantiated the allegations that chemical weapons have been used.

The Secretary-General attached paramount importance to the strict observance of all the principles and rules of international conduct accepted by the world community for the overriding purpose of preventing or alleviating human suffering, whether they related to the use of specific weapons, the treatment of prisoners of war or any other aspects of military operations.

The Secretary-General remained deeply convinced that these humanitarian concerns could only be fully satisfied by putting an end to the tragic conflict that continued to deplete the precious human resources of Iran and Iraq. He therefore once again reiterated his readiness to assist in any endeavour that could lead to peace for the people of these two countries. The Secretary-General hoped that both Governments would give such efforts a chance, and that all other States would assist them by contributing towards that end in whatever peaceful way they saw fit.