

Allegations of Iranian CW Use in the 1980–88 Gulf War

A critical analysis from open sources



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General observations

- ▶ Country study in CBW proliferation
 - ▶ Project itself implies presumption of guilt
 - Potential trap of seeking to confirm or deny presuppositions
- ▶ Iran viewed with suspicion in the West
- ▶ How to maintain scientific objectivity?
- ▶ Problem of sources and weighing information
 - ▶ Dominance of US and Israeli sources
 - ▶ Indiscriminate use of terminology
 - ▶ Allegation of use = allegation of possession
 - ▶ Statements by opposition groups
 - ▶ Unattributable quotes
 - ▶ Reports based on secondary or tertiary sources

The 1980–88 Gulf War

- ▶ Major impact on Iranian attitudes
 - ▶ Absence of formal international condemnation of Iraq
 - ▶ Questioning of value of international norms
 - ▶ Inability to organize a significant retaliatory capability
 - ▶ Major demoralizing effects on the military
 - ▶ Fear of CW missile strikes against population centres
- ▶ Today, maximization of prohibition scope and security guarantees under BTWC and CWC



Iran and the prohibition on CW use

- ▶ Prohibition on the use of poison in Islamic law
- ▶ Party to all international agreements on CW
 - ▶ 1899 Hague Declaration (IV, 2)
 - ▶ 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions
 - ▶ 1925 Geneva Protocol
 - ▶ (1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention)
 - ▶ 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention
- ▶ Only state in the Middle East

The ban on CW use in the Gulf War

- ▶ 1925 Geneva Protocol
 - ▶ Does not prohibit *possession* of CW
 - ▶ Does not exclude *retaliation* against another contracting party
- ▶ Regarding CW, Iran was never in contravention of then existing international law
- ▶ Western 'even-handedness' not based on international law, but on subjective appreciation of Islamic regime

Iranian CW capabilities prior to 1980–88 Gulf War

- ▶ No information on interest in CB warfare
- ▶ 1 mention of some officers receiving NBC training in USA
- ▶ Active US ally in cold war
 - ▶ Access to all US military equipment (save nukes)
 - ▶ Guarantees of US/NATO support in case of Soviet NBC attack
- ▶ Image of CW proliferator built up during the war

The emerging proliferator

- ▶ Iran initially not on US proliferation lists
- ▶ Gradual inclusion
 - ▶ Proliferator by association
 - Syria as Iranian ally and presumed possessor of CW
 - Association with Libya
 - Expansion of economic ties with East European states, notably GDR
 - ▶ Gradual acceptance of Iran as CW proliferator
- ▶ 1984: US imposition of export controls for CW precursors on both Iraq *and* Iran
 - ▶ US position accepted by several West European countries
 - ▶ Creation of Australia Group in 1985

Sources of allegations during Gulf War

- ▶ Opponents to the Islamic regime in exile
- ▶ Opposition groups inside Iran
 - ▶ E.g., (Clandestine) Radio Nejat-e
- ▶ Reports of purchases of precursors in Western countries
- ▶ Statements by Iranian officials of CW production capability and possession as of 1984

Iranian statements on CW possession

- ▶ Claims of Iraqi CW use as early as 1980/81
- ▶ 1st official statements on CW possession and production followed March 1984 UN investigation
- ▶ Stress on *deterrence* function; not retaliation
- ▶ In most cases, use of the phrases
 - ▶ 'has the capability'
 - ▶ '*will* use CW'
- ▶ Citations of Islamic prohibitions on the use of poison

Iranian unpreparedness for chemical warfare

- ▶ Initially, poor defensive capabilities
 - ▶ Success of Iraqi lachrymatory attacks against human wave attacks (1982)
 - ▶ 1984: Incredible naivité in purchase of gas masks from ROK and GDR
 - ▶ As late as 1986: Iranian diplomats still had to buy active charcoal and models of filters on trips abroad
- ▶ 1986: first descriptions of gas discipline among Revolutionary Guards during Fao campaigns
- ▶ Evidence of demoralizing effects of Iraqi CW use in the light of Iranian inability to retaliate

Iran's CW defence preparedness

- ▶ From 1987 onwards: organization of domestic production of defensive equipment
 - ▶ Note by UN investigators of Iranian 2-piece protective suite
 - ▶ February 1988: production of Deraksh-6 (Isfahan Construction Jihad)
 - ▶ April 1988: domestic production of gas masks (Iran Yasa factories)
- ▶ 1986-87 UN investigators note
 - ▶ High standards of medical treatment
 - ▶ Atropine auto-injectors for Revolutionary Guards
 - ▶ Equipment in key laboratories was same as used 20-30 years earlier in Western laboratories

Decontamination outside Halabja



Allegations of use

Iraqi claims

- ▶ Especially in the latter part of the war
- ▶ No independent confirmation of allegations
- ▶ April 1988: UN investigation confirms existence of Iraqi victims of CW agents, but no statement on source of exposure
- ▶ Many accounts of poor Iraqi tactics, 'blow-backs' or release of agents over own troops

Allegations of use

Western claims

- ▶ Statements during and after the war:
 - ▶ Possibility of Iranian use of captured Iraqi CW
 - ▶ Sporadic rather than systematic use
- ▶ All statements about major Iranian CW operations appear to have been made after the war
 - ▶ Essentially US sources
 - ▶ Report on Iranian CW use in Halabja, March 1988

Halabja: An Iranian CW attack?

- ▶ The allegation

- ▶ US State Department spokesman Charles Redman (23 Mar. 1988)
- ▶ Congressional Record, 30 Sep. 1988
- ▶ Variations on a theme

- ▶ The source?

*US Defense Intelligence Agency, Special Security Office
(23 Mar. 1988):*

6. Most of the casualties in Halabjah were reportedly caused by cyanogen chloride. This agent has never been used by Iraq, but Iran has shown interest in it. Mustard gas casualties in the town were probably caused by Iraqi weapons because Iran has never been noted using that agent.

Halabja: An Iranian CW attack?

- ▶ Problem 1: the alleged agent
 - ▶ Little military use
 - WW1 experience
 - Virtual impossibility to achieve lethal concentrations
 - Local climate in Halabja
 - ▶ Iraqi possession and technology?
 - UN recorded several Iranian claims of Iraqi use of HCN
 - Tabun production
 - UNSCOM findings
- ▶ Problem 2: assimilation of chemical warfare into Iranian military doctrine
 - ▶ Large quantities of CW
 - ▶ Availability of adequate delivery systems
 - ▶ Predelegation of authority to use CW
 - ▶ Forward storage of CW

Halabja: An Iranian CW attack?



- ▶ Problem 3: Wrong outward symptoms
 - ▶ Skin colouring should have been red instead of blue
 - ▶ Colouring suggestive of sarin
- ▶ Problem 4: Eyewitness accounts and captured Iraqi documents
 - ▶ Human Rights Watch, 1995

Current Iranian statements

On the conduct of the Gulf War

- ▶ At start of war, Iran had no offensive or defensive CW capabilities
- ▶ No use during the war; otherwise loss of moral high ground
- ▶ Acceptance of cease-fire in August 1988
 - ▶ Inability to retaliate
 - ▶ Fear of Iraqi missile strikes against population centres (inc. Tehran) with CW
 - ▶ Impact of massive Iraqi CW use during battles on the Fao peninsula in 1986

Current Iranian statements

On past production programmes

- ▶ Possession of CW production plants
 - ▶ Pilot-production scale facilities
 - ▶ No large-scale production facilities
 - ▶ Relatively few munitions produced
- ▶ Production in limited quantities of S-mustard
- ▶ Status of production of HCN unclear
- ▶ High dependency of foreign suppliers for defensive equipment

Current Iranian statements

On current status of production programmes

- ▶ CW production plants destroyed after Gulf War
- ▶ Munitions destroyed after war
- ▶ Declarations on past programmes submitted to OPCW
- ▶ Declarations certified by OPCW in November 1999
- ▶ Currently 1 firm for BC protection equipment, affiliated with MoD

Iranian BC defence industry

Main areas

- ▶ Protective masks
- ▶ Protective clothing
- ▶ Decontamination
- ▶ Filter systems
- ▶ Antidotes and medication

Iranian BC defence industry

Special Industries Group, Tehran

- ▶ Appears to be main supplier with a variety of goods
- ▶ Affiliated to MoD
- ▶ Products
 - ▶ IM-1 Protection mask
 - ▶ Protection mask filters
 - ▶ Chemical agent antidotes, protective creams and medications
 - ▶ Full protective clothing
 - ▶ CW agent detector (H automatically; other agents manually)
 - ▶ Decontamination apparatus and vehicles; decontaminant
 - ▶ Personnel decontamination shower system
 - ▶ Collective filtration systems

Iranian BC defence industry



Iranian BC defence industry

D.I.O. / BESAT

- ▶ Status of company uncertain
- ▶ BESAT appears to have been incorporated into D.I.O, which in turn appears to have become part of Special Industries Group
- ▶ Products
 - ▶ IM-1 Protection mask
 - ▶ IF-1 Filter

Iranian BC defence industry

MILAD Pharmaceuticals Co., Tehran

► Products

- Antidotes against nerve agents
 - Autoinjectors
 - Inhalation sprays
- Antidotes against blood poisonings with cyanide compounds
- Protective creams against blister agents
- Individual decontamination powders for equipment and the skin
- Range of commercial products
 - Mostly products against skin burns and infections
 - Dermal insect repellent cream
 - CS Spray for police and 'common people'

