View Declassified CIA Documents Revealing U.S. Acquiescence In 1988 During Iraq's Multiple Usage Of Chemical Weapons Against Iranian Forces

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Michael Matthew Bloomer, August 27, 2013

> *The U.S. government may be considering military action in response to chemical strikes near Damascus. But a generation ago, America's military and intelligence communities knew about and did nothing to stop a series of nerve gas attacks far more devastating than anything Syria has seen . . .*
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> Foreign Policy Magazine, August 26, 2013

Yesterday, in a dramatic and timely move, Foreign Policy Magazine (FP) posted a chillingly relevant story as the Obama administration considers military action against Syria. Their exclusive report, Exclusive: CIA Files Prove America Helped Saddam as He Gassed Iran, presented declassified CIA documents from 1982 to 1985. Produced during the Iraq-Iran war, the documents, six of the seven set out below, reveal what FP aptly terms the "cold calculus" of U.S. chemical weapons policy, at least toward its enemy Iran, during the conflict that many believe cost one million lives.

The Foreign Policy Magazine report reveals the implicit Reagan administration acquiescence in Iraq's multiple 1988 use of mustard gas and sarin against Iranian forces.

> In 1988, during the waning days of Iraq's war with Iran, the United States learned through satellite imagery that Iran was about to gain a major strategic advantage by exploiting a hole in Iraqi defenses. U.S. intelligence officials conveyed the location of the Iranian troops to Iraq, fully aware that Hussein's military would attack with chemical weapons, including sarin, a lethal nerve agent.
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> The intelligence included imagery and maps about Iranian troop movements, as well as the locations of Iranian logistics facilities and details about Iranian air defenses. The Iraqis used mustard gas and sarin prior to four major offensives in early 1988 that relied on U.S. satellite imagery, maps, and other intelligence. These attacks helped to tilt the war in Iraq's favor and bring Iran to the negotiating table, and they ensured that the Reagan administration's long-standing policy of securing an Iraqi victory would succeed . . .

FP reports that

> According to recently declassified CIA documents and interviews with former intelligence officials [like retired Air Force Col. Rick Francona, who was a military attaché in Baghdad during the 1988 strikes], the U.S. had firm evidence of Iraqi chemical attacks beginning in 1983. At the time, Iran was publicly alleging that illegal chemical attacks were carried out on its forces, and was building a case to present to the United Nations. But it lacked the evidence implicating Iraq, much of which was contained in top secret reports and memoranda sent to the most senior intelligence officials in the U.S. government. The CIA declined to comment for this story.
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> In contrast to today's wrenching debate over whether the United States should intervene to stop alleged chemical weapons attacks by the Syrian government, the United States applied a cold calculus three decades ago to Hussein's widespread use of chemical weapons against his enemies and his own people. The Reagan administration decided that it was better to let the attacks continue if they might turn the tide of the war. And even if they were discovered, the CIA wagered that international outrage and condemnation would be muted.
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> In the documents, the CIA said that Iran might not discover persuasive evidence of the weapons' use -- even though the agency possessed it. Also, the agency noted that the Soviet Union had previously used chemical agents in Afghanistan and suffered few repercussions.

Ahh, the politics of strange bedfellows and the enemy of my enemy is my friend . . .

Here are six of the seven declassified CIA documents, courtesy of Foreign Policy Magazine (click on each document, it will open in a new tab):

Note: the seventh document appears here (*Intelligence Assessment of Iraqi Chemical Weapons Program* (1985)).

Iran-Iraq Situation Report

Iran's Likely Reaction to Iraqi Use of Chemical Weapons

Memo Predicts Use of Nerve Agents

CIA Predicts Widespread Use of Mustard Agents and Use of Nerve Agent by Late Summer

CIA Confirms Iraq Used Nerve Agent

Note on Chemical Weapons Proliferation and Posisble Consequences

For more coverage of possible military intervention in Syria:

John McCain and McCain Wannabe Lindsey Graham, Like Whiskey With A Milk Chaser, Talk U.S. Intervention In Syria

Does Syria Really Need More Heating Up?

Despite John McCain's Push For Military Intervention In Syria, What's The Rush?

Military Intervention In Syria? View Declassified 1985 CIA Intelligence Assessment Of Iraqi Chemical Weapons Program