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## IRAQ CW CAPABILITY DURING THE GULF WAR: AGENT 15

Iraq has still not fully disclosed the extent of its programme to acquire chemical and biological weapons: it has consistently sought to obstruct the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) from carrying out the mandates of Security Council Resolutions 687 and 699. In particular, it has sought to deceive UNSCOM about the scale of its production of the highly toxic nerve agent VX and the use of chemical warfare agents during the Iran/Iraq war. Iraq has also yet to admit to producing plague bacteria as part of its biological warfare programme.

The MOD has recently received intelligence, believed to be reliable, which indicates that, at the time of the Gulf War, Iraq may have possessed large quantities of a chemical warfare mental incapacitant agent known as Agent 15.

Our knowledge of Agent 15 itself is limited. Agent 15 is one of a large group of chemicals called glycollates (esters of glycollic acid). The best known is usually referred to by the initials BZ. The physiological effects of these compounds are typical of anticholinergic agents, which block cholinergic nerve transmission in the central and peripheral nervous system.

On the basis of animal studies with BZ and other related materials which were carried out some years ago, we believe that the immediate effects of Agent 15 would include: dilated pupils, flushed faces, dry mouth, tachycardia, increase in skin and body temperature, weakness, dizziness, disorientation, visual hallucinations, confusions, loss of time sense, loss of coordination and stupor.

We have known since 1985 that Iraq was investigating CW agents of this type, but the first indication of a specific interest in Agent 15 came in a brief reference contained in an Iraqi document, which we became aware of in August 1995 and which stated that Iraq was carrying out laboratory research on this agent. The first indications that Iraq had possessed large stocks of Agent 15 came late last year, since when my Department has conducted an assessment of the relevant scientific and background information.

MOD remains of the view that there is no confirmed evidence of the use of CW by Iraq during the Gulf War. We are nevertheless considering how best to investigate Agent 15 further, with a view to gaining a better understanding of its long term effects. This will be taken into account in our ongoing work to address Gulf veterans' health concerns.

Ministry of Defence  
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