

# Chemical and Biological News

## ARMS CONTROL

### Kansas Site Gets Final OK to Host Biological Defense Lab

The U.S. Homeland Security Department has finalized its decision to build a planned \$450 million biological defense laboratory at a 59-acre site in Kansas, the Associated Press reported.

When built on the Kansas State University property at Manhattan, the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility would assume responsibility for research on anthrax and other diseases conducted for decades by a laboratory at Plum Island, N.Y.

The department would not comment on the approval because the final record of decision was not made public, but the state's U.S. senators verified that Homeland Security Undersecretary Jay Cohen had signed the document.

"With this new lab, Kansas will cement its reputation as the nation's leader in plant and animal health research and the biosciences," Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) said in a statement. "We will reap the benefits of a cutting edge industry while protecting the nation's food supply and agricultural economy for years to come."

Kansas State officials suggested that the nearby Biosecurity Research Institute might assume some of the laboratory's duties until the new facility is ready in 2015. Institute scientists already conduct sensitive studies involving crop and livestock ailments.

Kansas edged out several other states competing to host the site, prompting threats from Texas and Mississippi officials to challenge the decision in court.

Texas Governor Rick Perry argued last week that lawmakers in his state were not convened

last year to draw up a competitive financial offer, ultimately skewing the selection process.

[http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20090113\\_2249.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090113_2249.php)

### Bush Establishes Laboratory Biosecurity Panel

U.S. President George W. Bush last week issued an executive order establishing a high-level working group to study strategies for augmenting security at laboratories that conduct research on dangerous diseases, the White House announced.

"It is the policy of the United States that facilities that possess biological select agents and toxins have appropriate security and personnel assurance practices to protect against theft, misuse, or diversion to unlawful activity of such agents and toxins," according to the executive order. Therefore, "there is hereby established, within the Department of Defense for administrative purposes only, the Working Group on Strengthening the Biosecurity of the United States."

The working group would include the U.S. secretaries of state, agriculture, commerce, transportation, energy and homeland security, along with the attorney general, national intelligence director, the heads of the National Science Foundation and the Environmental Protection Agency and possibly other officials.

The working group is expected to study existing biosecurity laws and regulations, along with current physical, facility and personnel security measures in place at disease research sites. Within 180 days of the executive order, it must issue a report containing recommendations on possible new rules and security measures, options for comprehensive oversight systems at laboratories, and "a comparison of the range of existing personnel security and assurance programs for access to biological select agents

and toxins to personnel security and assurance programs in other fields and industries.”

The report would be submitted to President-elect Barack Obama, who takes office on January 20, 2009.

[http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20090112\\_2069.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090112_2069.php)

## **China committed to int'l mechanisms on arms control, non-proliferation**

The Chinese Government has always attached importance to and been supportive of international efforts in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, said a white paper.

In a defense white paper issued, China reaffirmed its resolve and measures to support the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

It was the first time that China's defense white paper devoted a whole chapter to arms control and disarmament.

On nuclear disarmament, the paper said: “China holds all nuclear-weapon states should make an unequivocal commitment to the thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, and reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security policy.”

China supported the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and will continue to honor its moratorium commitment on nuclear testing, the paper said.

“China will not be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and in any circumstances, and will unconditionally not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or in nuclear-weapon-free zones,” it said.

China called on other nuclear-weapon states to make the same commitments and conclude an international legal instrument in this regard.

China maintained the global missile defense program would be detrimental to strategic balance and stability, it said.

On the prohibition of biological and chemical weapons, China observed its obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), and supports the multilateral efforts aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the Convention.

On non-proliferation, the paper said China firmly opposes the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery, and actively takes part in international non-proliferation efforts.

The paper, the sixth of its kind Chinese government issued since 1998, gives an overall picture of China's national defense ranging from the security environment, national defense policy, to defense expenditure and arms control.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/20/content\\_10688964.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/20/content_10688964.htm)

## **DISARMAMENT**

### **Iraq Joins Chemical Weapons Convention**

Iraq, a nation that once used blister and nerve agents in war and against its own people, yesterday joined the international ban on chemical weapons.

Baghdad submitted its accession document to the United Nations and will become the 186th member nation to the Chemical Weapons Convention on February 12, 2009. The treaty prohibits development, production, stockpiling or use of weapons that feature materials such as mustard gas or the nerve agents VX and sarin.

There are now only nine states that remain outside the convention — Angola, the Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia and Syria.

“Iraq’s accession draws us closer to the convention’s goal of the universal ban on chemical weapons, and we call upon those nine states that have not yet adhered to the convention to do so without delay,” Rogelio Pfirter, director general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the verification body for the treaty, said in a prepared statement.

The Bahamas is likely to be the next state to join the pact, possibly in a matter of months, said OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan. He acknowledged the challenge of reaching treaty universality, particularly when it comes to the Middle East, where long-standing tensions have been exacerbated by recent fighting in the Gaza Strip.

“It’s difficult. The equation in the Middle East transcends the particular issue of chemical weapons,” Luhan told *Global Security Newswire*. “Certainly we hope that the accession of both Lebanon and Iraq will generate some fresh thinking on the convention [by Egypt, Israel and Syria] and perhaps create some sense of momentum. But ... with everything happening in the Middle East right now, our expectations are moderate.”

Those three Middle Eastern nations are all believed to have had some history with chemical weapons activities, with Syria suspected of possessing a stockpile of blister and nerve agents.

More than 42 percent of the declared global stockpile of chemical warfare materials has been eliminated; work is complete in Albania and an unidentified nation generally known to be South Korea, while Libya, India, Russia and the United States are at varying points in the disposal process.

Iraq reportedly established an offensive chemical weapons program in the late 1960s that led to the production of warfare materials in the 1980s, according to an online time line developed by the Nuclear Threat Initiative. The Hussein regime employed mustard gas and tabun nerve agent against Iranian forces while the two nations were at war in the 1980s, and

also killed thousands of Iraqi Kurds during crackdowns in that decade.

Following the first Gulf War, U.N. inspectors or the Hussein regime itself verifiably destroyed nearly 700 metric tons of Iraqi chemical weapons agents, along with almost 90,000 munitions, 980 crucial chemical weapons production items and related material, according to NTI.

The U.S.-led 2003 invasion of Iraq was conducted partly on the assertion that Baghdad was again stockpiling chemical weapons and conducting other WMD programs. However, inspectors in 2004 reported that while Saddam Hussein hoped one day to resume chemical warfare activities, his nation had eliminated its toxic arsenal in 1991.

Several hundred abandoned chemical weapons have been found in Iraq since the invasion, though they are believed to have been produced before 1991 and had deteriorated to the point of being unusable. The weapons were being destroyed as they were located, the U.S. Defense Department said in 2006.

Iraq must within 30 days of becoming a CWC member state file a declaration with the Hague-based monitoring agency identifying any remaining chemical weapons stockpiles or production facilities.

“It’s a given that there are no chemical weapons stockpiles that will be declared from Iraq,” said Paul Walker, security and sustainability chief at the environmental group Global Green USA. However, buried or dumped chemical agents and weapons might still someday be found that would have to be dealt with, he added.

The Iraqi Embassy in Washington had not responded by press time today to a request for comment regarding details of its chemical declaration.

Any necessary “destruction process, as with every other possessor state, will be verified by OPCW,” Luhan said. “In Iraq’s case ... depending on the [security] circumstances there, if Iraq does declare CW or production facilities, destruction could be in the presence

of an inspection team or without the presence of an inspection team but with full documentation, meaning pictures, videos and so forth.”

[http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20090114\\_3530.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090114_3530.php)

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### Al Qaeda’s bio-warfare directors are in Pakistan

An al Qaeda affiliate in Algeria closed a base earlier this month after an experiment with unconventional weapons went awry, a senior U.S. intelligence official said.

The official, who spoke on the condition he not be named because of the sensitive nature of the issue, said he could not confirm press reports that the accident killed at least 40 al Qaeda operatives, but he said the mishap led the militant group to shut down a base in the mountains of Tizi Ouzou province in eastern Algeria.

He said authorities in the first week of January intercepted an urgent communication between the leadership of al Qaeda in the Land of the Maghreb (AQIM) and al Qaeda’s leadership in the tribal region of Pakistan on the border with Afghanistan. The communication suggested that an area sealed to prevent leakage of a biological or chemical substance had been breached, according to the official. “We don’t know if this is biological or chemical,” the official said.

AQIM, according to U.S. intelligence estimates, maintains about a dozen bases in Algeria, where the group has waged a terrorist campaign against government forces and civilians. In 2006, the group claimed responsibility for an attack on foreign contractors. In 2007, the group said it bombed U.N. headquarters in Algiers, an attack that killed 41 people.

Al Qaeda is believed by U.S. and Western experts to have been pursuing biological weapons since at least the late 1990s. A 2005 report on unconventional weapons drafted by a commission led by former Sen. Charles Robb, Virginia Democrat, and federal appeals court Judge Laurence Silberman concluded that al Qaeda’s biological weapons program “was extensive, well organized and operated two years before the Sept. 11” terror attacks in the U.S.

Another report from the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation, released in December, warned that “terrorists are more likely to be able to obtain and use a biological weapon than a nuclear weapon.”

British authorities in January 2003 arrested seven men they accused of producing a poison from castor beans known as ricin. British officials said one of the suspects had visited an al Qaeda training camp. In the investigation into the case, British authorities found an undated al Qaeda manual on assassinations with a recipe for making the poison. The late leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab Zarqawi, was suspected of developing ricin in northern Iraq. Then-Secretary of State Colin L. Powell referred to the poison in his presentation to the U.N. Security Council in February 2003 that sought to lay the groundwork for the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Roger Cressey, a former senior counterterrorism official at the National Security Council under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, told The Washington Times that al Qaeda has had an interest in acquiring a poisons capability since the late 1990s.

“This is something that al Qaeda still aspires to do, and the infrastructure to develop it does not have to be that sophisticated,” he said. Mr. Cressey added that he also is concerned about al Qaeda in the Land of the Maghreb, which refers to the North African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

"Al Qaeda in the Maghreb is probably the most operationally capable affiliate in the organisation right now," he said.

## **Algerian Al-Qaeda activists infected themselves with Black Death, says expert**

The al-Qaeda cell that was wiped out in Algeria by the Black Death may have infected itself while developing biological weapons.

According to The Sun, the 40-odd terrorists, who succumbed to the plague, planned to wreak havoc on Western targets but fell victims to their own weapon. According to Dr Igor Khrupinov, a leading expert on chemical warfare at Georgia University, the "Al-Qaeda is known to experiment with biological weapons. And, this group has direct communication with other cells around the world. Contagious diseases, like ebola and anthrax, occur in northern Africa. It makes sense that people are trying to use them against Western governments."

Dr. Khrupinov, once arms adviser to Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev, added: "Instead of using bombs, people with infectious diseases could be walking through cities."

<http://story.zimabwe.com/index.php/ct/9/cid/c1ab2109a5bf37ec/id/455899/cs/1/>

## **Fears in US about Mumbai-type attacks**

The terrorist attacks in Mumbai have dramatically damaged Pakistan's image in the United States where a consensus seems to be emerging that the terrorists may be planning a Mumbai-like attack on the US as well and that if such an attack happens, it will originate in Pakistan.

Over the past two days, more than a dozen senior US officials, lawmakers and terrorism experts discussed various scenarios for a

possible terrorist attack on the United States. All pointed their fingers at Pakistan.

And these were not unnamed intelligence officials who in the past discussed such scenarios with the US media on the condition that they remained anonymous.

These were all senior officials and lawmakers — such as Gen David H. Petraeus, the new head of the US Central Command; Ken Wainstein, the White House national security adviser; and Senator Joe Lieberman, chairman Senate Homeland and Governmental Affairs Committee. And they were all speaking on the record.

There were differences among them on the nature of the next terrorist attack on the United States, but not on its source. All agreed that the terrorists hiding in Pakistan's tribal areas were already planning such an attack.

Before the Mumbai attacks, US officials and terrorism experts focussed on terrorists acquiring a so-called 'dirty bomb'; a small nuclear, chemical or biological device big enough to cause serious damage to a major US city.

But the Mumbai attack seems to have changed their views.

"US cities are vulnerable to an attack like the gun-and-grenade assault that terrorised Mumbai for three days and killed 179 people," argued Mr Wainstein.

The US Senate Homeland and Governmental Affairs Committee, which held a special hearing on the Mumbai attacks on Thursday evening, agreed.

The lawmakers, who participated in the hearing, admitted that they feared a Mumbai-like attack could happen in the United States.

And Gen David H. Petraeus, the man responsible for winning the war against terror, warned that the United States would need to make a "sustained, substantial" commitment if it wanted to stop the Taliban and Al Qaeda

militants hiding in Fata from resurging in Afghanistan.

Gen Petraeus linked Afghanistan's fortunes directly to Pakistan's where, he observed, a US-backed civilian government was struggling and the country's ability to control militants along its border with Afghanistan was in doubt.

"Afghanistan and Pakistan have, in many ways, merged into a single problem set, and the way forward in Afghanistan is incomplete without a strategy that includes and assists Pakistan, and also takes into account Pakistan's troubled relationship with rival India," Gen Petraeus said.

The need to fight Al Qaeda and Taliban militants hiding in Pakistan's tribal region was even included in a national agenda that Democrats issued a day after the new Congress was sworn in. The Democrats, who are now a majority in the US legislature, want a deeper US involvement in fighting the terrorists hiding in Fata. Mr Wainstein told a Washington think-tank the Mumbai attacks in November showed the effectiveness of a low-technology coordinated assault on an open city.

He did not rule out the possibility of terrorists in Fata acquiring a 'dirty bomb' and recalled that in December of 2001 "we and the United Nations designated as a supporter of terrorism a group of Pakistani scientists and former government officials — known as the UTN — who had worked with the Taliban and had previously discussed nuclear, chemical and biological weapons with Osama bin Laden."

Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, the number two Democrat in the Senate, stressed that by refocussing "our resources on Al Qaeda, Afghanistan, and Pakistan ... we will protect our nation from other deadly weapons and will share more effectively in the fight against terrorism".

Senator Lieberman insisted that "they (Pakistanis) and we know" that there're terrorist camps inside Pakistan. "They need to finish them," he added.

The Pakistanis, he said, also needed to ensure that "there are no links between terrorists and their intelligence agencies".

Mr Lieberman said he knew that President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani were trying to uproot terrorism from their country "but unfortunately the contacts between the terrorists and Pakistani intelligence agencies remain".

The United States, he said, did not want the alleged terrorist camps in Pakistan to close just because of what happened in Mumbai. "We want this because the camps also provide refuge to radical elements from the US and they are risk for our security as well."

Donald Van Duyn, Deputy Assistant Director of the Counter-terrorism Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said the attacks in Mumbai showed how ordinary weapons could cause mass casualties. "It comes as no surprise that a small, disciplined team of highly trained individuals can wreak the level of havoc that we saw in Mumbai. Other terrorist groups will no doubt take note of and seek to emulate the Mumbai attacks," he said.

Those involved in the Mumbai attacks, about 10 in all, were armed with automatic rifles and grenades, and carried global positioning devices when they came ashore on speedboats and descended on hotels and restaurants and other sites, taking and killing hostages.

<http://www.dawn.com/2009/01/10/top12.htm>

## **Experts Debate Threat of Nuclear, Biological Terrorism**

There is an "almost vanishingly small" likelihood that terrorists would ever be able to acquire and detonate a nuclear weapon, one expert said.

In even the most likely scenario of nuclear terrorism, there are 20 barriers between extremists and a successful nuclear strike on a major city, said John Mueller, a political science professor at Ohio State University.

The process itself is seemingly straightforward but exceedingly difficult — buy or steal highly enriched uranium, manufacture a weapon, take the bomb to the target site and blow it up. Meanwhile, variables strewn across the path to an attack would increase the complexity of the effort, Mueller argued.

Terrorists would have to bribe officials in a state nuclear program to acquire the material, while avoiding a sting by authorities or a scam by the sellers. The material itself could also turn out to be bad.

“Once the purloined material is purloined, [police are] going to be chasing after you. They are also going to put on a high reward, extremely high reward, on getting the weapon back or getting the fissile material back,” Mueller said during a panel discussion at a two-day Cato Institute conference on counterterrorism issues facing the incoming Obama administration.

Smuggling the material out of a country would mean relying on criminals who “are very good at extortion” and might have to be killed to avoid a double-cross, Mueller said. The terrorists would then have to find scientists and engineers willing to give up their normal lives to manufacture a bomb, which would require an expensive and sophisticated machine shop.

Finally, further technological expertise would be needed to sneak the weapon across national borders to its destination point and conduct a successful detonation, Mueller said.

Every obstacle is “difficult but not impossible” to overcome, Mueller said, putting the chance of success at no less than one in three for each. The likelihood of successfully passing through each obstacle, in sequence, would be roughly one in 3 1/2 billion, he said, but for argument’s sake dropped it to 3 1/2 million.

“It’s a total gamble. This is a very expensive and difficult thing to do,” said Mueller, who addresses the issue at greater length in an upcoming book, *Atomic Obsession*. “So unlike buying a ticket to the lottery ... you’re basically putting everything, including your life, at stake

for a gamble that’s maybe one in 3 1/2 million or 3 1/2 billion.”

Other scenarios are even less probable, Mueller said.

A nuclear-armed state is “exceedingly unlikely” to hand a weapon to a terrorist group, he argued: “States just simply won’t give it to somebody they can’t control.”

Terrorists are also not likely to be able to steal a whole weapon, Mueller asserted, dismissing the idea of “loose nukes.” Even Pakistan, which today is perhaps the nation of greatest concern regarding nuclear security, keeps its bombs in two segments that are stored at different locations, he said.

Fear of an “extremely improbable event” such as nuclear terrorism produces support for a wide range of homeland security activities, Mueller said. He argued that there has been a major and costly overreaction to the terrorism threat — noting that the Sept. 11 attacks helped to precipitate the invasion of Iraq, which has led to far more deaths than the original event.

Panel moderator Benjamin Friedman, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, said academic and governmental discussions of acts of nuclear or biological terrorism have tended to focus on “worst-case assumptions about terrorists’ ability to use these weapons to kill us.” There is need for consideration for what is probable rather than simply what is possible, he said.

Friedman took issue with the finding late last year of an experts’ report that an act of WMD terrorism would “more likely than not” occur in the next half decade unless the international community takes greater action. “I would say that the report, if you read it, actually offers no analysis to justify that claim, which seems to have been made to change policy by generating alarm in headlines.”

One panel speaker offered a partial rebuttal to Mueller’s presentation. Jim Walsh, principal research scientist for the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology, said he agreed that nations would almost certainly not give a nuclear weapon to a nonstate group, that most terrorist organizations have no interest in seeking out the bomb, and that it would be difficult to build a weapon or use one that has been stolen.

However, he disputed Mueller's assertion that nations can be trusted to secure their atomic weapons and materials. "I don't think the historical record shows that at all," Walsh said.

Black-market networks such as the organization once operated by former top Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan remain a problem and should not be assumed to be easily defeated by international intelligence services, Walsh said. It is also reasonable to worry about extremists gaining access to nuclear blueprints or poorly secured stocks of highly enriched uranium, he said.

"I worry about al-Qaeda 4.0, kids in Europe who go to good schools 20 years from now. Or types of terrorists we don't even imagine," Walsh said.

Greater consideration must be given to exactly how much risk is tolerable and what actions must be taken to reduce the threat, he added.

"For all the alarmism, we haven't done that much about the problem," Walsh said. "We've done a lot in the name of nuclear terrorism, the attack on Iraq, these other things, but we have moved ever so modestly to lock down nuclear materials."

## **Biological Terrorism**

Another two analysts offered a similar debate on the potential for terrorists to carry out an attack using infectious disease material.

Milton Leitenberg, a senior research scholar at the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland, played down the threat in comparison to other health risks. Bioterrorism has killed five U.S. citizens in the 21st century — the victims of the 2001 anthrax attacks, he said. Meanwhile, at least 400,000 deaths are linked each year to obesity in this country.

The United States has authorized \$57 billion in spending since the anthrax mailings for biological prevention and defense activities, Leitenberg said. Much of the money would have been better used to prepare for pandemic flu, he argued.

"Mistaken threat assessments make mistaken policy and make mistaken allocation of financial resources," Leitenberg said.

The number of states with offensive biological weapons programs appears to have stabilized at six beginning in the mid-1970s, despite subsequent intelligence estimates that once indicated an increasing number of efforts, Leitenberg said. Caveats in present analyses of those states make it near-impossible to determine the extent to which their activities remain offensive in nature, he added.

There has been minimal proliferation of biological expertise or technology to nations of concern in recent decades, Leitenberg said. He identified roughly 12 Russian scientists who ended up in Iran and shipments of technology and pathogen strains to Iraq from France, Germany, the former Soviet Union and the United States between 1980 and 1990.

No evidence exists of state assistance to nonstate groups in this sector. Two prominent extremist organizations, al-Qaeda and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, failed to produce pathogenic disease strains that could be used in an attack, according to Leitenberg.

Terrorists would have to acquire the correct disease strain, handle it safely, correctly reproduce and store the material and then disperse it properly, Leitenberg said. He dismissed their ability to do so.

"What we've found so far is that those people have been totally abysmally ignorant of how to read the technical, professional literature," Leitenberg said. "What's on the jihadi Web sites comes from American poisoners' handbooks sold here at gun shows. Which can't make anything and what it would make is just garbage."



Randall Larsen, national security adviser to the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Biosecurity, expressed less confidence in terrorists' incompetence.

Scientific and technological advances could enable the production of a dangerous biological agent using technology purchased through the Internet, he said.

"This is what you can do that took superpower technology in the '60s that graduate students can do in laboratories and universities ... around the world today," according to Larsen.

He also took issue with Leitenberg's assertion regarding the biological capabilities of Aum Shinrikyo, the cult best known for the 1995 sarin nerve agent attack on the Tokyo subway system. Recent interviews with personnel from the cult's biological program indicated they succeeded in producing a pathogenic disease strain, but that the material was "screwed up" during mass production, Larsen said.

"It is a very, very difficult challenge for the intelligence community to find out if a terrorist organisation is developing a biological weapon in a room smaller than this," he said.

[http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20090113\\_7105.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090113_7105.php)

## **Iran accuses Israel of using chemical weapons in Gaza**

Iran is seeking for United Nations' serious action over Israel's use of chemical weapons in Gaza, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki made the accusation against Israel in a letter to UN Chief Ban Ki-moon, urging for a "serious and effective action" over Israel's use of chemical weapons in Gaza, according to the report.

"In recent attacks by the Zionist regime's troops on Gaza, the regime's army has several times used banned weapons, including dangerous, toxic materials causing painful deaths, incapacitation or physical disabilities," Mottaki

was quoted as saying in the letter. He also called the use of the chemical weapons as the "examples of war crimes."

Earlier, Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics also issued a statement to denounce the Israeli use of chemical weapons in Gaza, saying that "the Zionist regime" had fired "white phosphorus into Gaza."

"According to the Geneva Protocol 1925, using the poisonous gases is forbidden," the statement said.

Geneva Protocol 1925 prohibits the use of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of bacteriological methods of warfare declared in Geneva on June 17, 1925.

After about three weeks of an unprecedented military air and ground offensive of Israel on Gaza since Dec. 27, where around 1,240 Palestinians killed and more than 5,200 others wounded, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared a unilateral ceasefire in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, beginning from 2 a.m. (0000 GMT) Sunday.

"We have reached all of our objectives in Gaza," Olmert told a press conference in Tel Aviv, adding that Hamas has been dealt a heavy blow and its leaders are now in hiding.

However, on Sunday morning, hours after the unilateral ceasefire went into effect, southern Israel was pounded by a number of rockets fired from Gaza and the Israeli army confirmed that it opened fire after Gazan militants attacked Israeli troops in the Palestinian enclave.

At least one Palestinian was reportedly killed by the exchange of fire on Sunday morning.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/18/content\\_10678977.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/18/content_10678977.htm)

## **China Presses Japan on Abandoned Chemical Weapons**

Chinese officials today pressed Japan to follow through on its pledge to recover and eliminate chemical weapons abandoned in China at the

close of World War II, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

Beijing has claimed that 2 million tons of Japanese chemical munitions were left in roughly 40 locations in 15 provinces, particularly the Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces in northeast China. The two nations in 1999 signed an agreement on eliminating the weapons.

Xinhua reported last month that excavation had begun of weapons abandoned at Haerbaling in the Jilin Province. However, Tokyo has suspended the effort and cut related funding, according to the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper.

“China has demanded that the Japanese side clarify the report. The Japanese side said clearly that the report does not conform to the fact, and there’s no change to the government’s principle to speed up the process of dealing with the chemical weapons it abandoned in China during World War II,” said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu.

[http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20090123\\_7236.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090123_7236.php)

## **Regev: Hamas used phosphorus not Israel**

An Israeli spokesman suggests Gaza phosphorus casualties may have been caused by Hamas after the Foreign Ministry admitted to using the weapon.

After weeks of mounting evidence and international outcry by human rights groups about the use of phosphorus shells by the Israeli army in the heavily populated Gaza Strip, Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev made an effort to shift the blame onto Hamas resistance movement.

“When you walk into a totalitarian government where people have injuries, how do you know that some of these injuries aren’t caused - for example - by Hamas munitions?” Regev told Britain’s Channel Four.

When confronted by the Channel Four presenter for accusing Hamas, Regev argued that the democratically-elected government of Hamas is an “authoritarian government” and therefore reports gathered from witnesses in Gaza can not be relied upon.

He went on to lash out at a report by the channel’s correspondent in Gaza for suggesting that “Israel went and randomly killed civilians” adding that it “is not clearly the case.”

This is while according to Health officials in the embattled strip 23 days of intense Israeli military operation in Gaza left more than 1,300 Palestinians dead and some 5,450 others wounded.

On the other hand, according to the Israeli army, thirteen Israelis including three civilians were killed.

Regev’s remarks came as Yigal Palmor, an Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman finally admitted on Friday that the controversial chemical weapon was deployed in its offensive against the Palestinian territory.

“Yes, phosphorus was used but not in any illegal manner,” Palmor told *The Times*. “Some practices could be illegal but we are going into that. The IDF is holding an investigation concerning one specific incident.”

Palmor was referring to the Israeli shelling of a UN headquarters in Gaza where the compound was hit by three white phosphorus shells causing a fire which destroyed much of the aid supplies.

While international law permits the use of white phosphorus as an obscurant to conceal troop movement and prevent the enemy from using certain guided weapons, its use remains controversial in civilian areas, as it sticks to human skin and burns right through to the bone.

The burns cause death or leave survivors with painful wounds which are slow to heal. The chemical’s ingestion or inhalation can also be fatal.

Human rights group Amnesty International along with many other countries has accused Israel of committing war crimes in the embattled Palestinian territory.

"Such extensive use of this weapon in Gaza's densely populated residential neighborhoods is inherently indiscriminate," Donatella Rovera, a Middle East researcher with Amnesty International, said in a Jan 20 statement.

"Its repeated use in this manner, despite evidence of its indiscriminate effects and its toll on civilians, is a war crime," she charged.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=83598&sectionid=351020202>

## **Singapore opens border facility to reduce threat of chemical, biological attacks**

Singapore has opened the world's first border facility to weed out the threat of chemical and biological attacks.

Called the Protective and Analytical Facility, it is located at the Tuas Checkpoint in western Singapore.

About a million cargo vehicles pass through the Tuas Checkpoint every year. As the frequency in border crossings between Singapore and its neighbours increases, so too does the threat of a biological attack.

All hazardous cargoes and livestock entering Singapore must do so through the Tuas Checkpoint. This makes frontline customs officers at the checkpoint most at risk of exposure to chemical and biological hazards.

The new facility will strengthen Singapore's defence against these threats. An early warning system will detect the release of hazardous agents at the checkpoint cargo lanes.

If there is a chemical spill or deliberate attack, those affected can wash themselves at the decontamination facility. There is also a laboratory to identify and analyse the chemical.

Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng, who is also the Home Affairs Minister, said: "Our checkpoints cannot be viewed simply as a mere crossing for efficient immigration and customs clearance procedures. It is the critical first line of defence of our national security."

Citing the SARS episode in 2003, Mr Wong also warned against biological agents that could cause an outbreak in the country.

Mr Wong said while they may not be terrorist acts, their potential consequences are no less devastating.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/403675/1/.html>

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **Terrorists could use 'insect-based' biological weapon**

Terrorists would find it "relatively easy" to launch a devastating attack using swarms of insects to spread a deadly disease, an academic has warned.

Jeffrey Lockwood, professor of entomology at Wyoming University and author of *Six-legged Soldiers: Using Insects as Weapons of War*, said such Rift Valley Fever or other diseases could be transported into a country by a terrorist with a suitcase.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "I think a small terrorist cell could very easily develop an insect-based weapon."

He said it would "probably be much easier" than developing a nuclear or chemical weapon, arguing: "The raw material is in the back yard."

He continued: "It would be a relatively easy and simple process.

"A few hundred dollars and a plane ticket and you could have a pretty good stab at it."

Governments, he advised, needed to have robust “pest management infrastructure that’s able to absorb and respond to an introduction” of infected insects, he said.

Trying to stop everything coming in at the border would not work, he said.

Rift Valley Fever is an east African disease which “can cause severe disease in both animals and humans, leading to high rates of disease and death” according to the World Health Organisation.

However, WHO says that “the vast majority of human infections result from direct or indirect contact with the blood or organs of infected animals.”

***<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/wildlife/4123782/Terrorists-could-use-insect-based-biological-weapon.html>***

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