

Chemical and Biological News

ARMS CONTROL

Yemen moves to outlaw chemical weapons

The Yemeni Cabinet approved a draft measure to outlaw the use, stockpiling and manufacture of chemical weapons, officials said.

Submitted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the law is meant to keep Yemen compliant with the terms of an international treaty it signed in 2000, the country's official news agency, SABA, reported.

Officials noted the law would also allow Yemen to use chemicals covered by the treaty — the International Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction — for non-prohibited purposes.

SABA said the Cabinet asserted the measure will aid in preventing the use of chemical weapons by terrorists, thus enhancing Yemen's security and stability.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/International/2010/01/19/Yemen-moves-to-outlaw-chemical-weapons/UPI-80491263923242/

Umatilla Chemical Depot Resumes Disposal Operations

The incineration of chemical warfare materials stockpiled at the Umatilla Chemical Depot in Oregon has started up again following the state-ordered halt to disposal in October, the Tri-City, Wash., *Herald* reported (see *GSN*, Dec. 15, 2009).

The burning of mustard agent was permitted to resume after more restrictive limits were established on the amount of organic salts allowed in bulk containers going through the incinerator. The cap was set in order to comply with air quality regulations and to prevent potentially unsafe emissions from the

Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility; it is expected to prolong chemical disarmament work at the depot.

The Oregon Environmental Quality Department on Friday gave its approval to an initial permit for a trial burn that limits the amount of salt permitted to 435 pounds, agency Chemical Demilitarization Program official Rich Duval said.

A single ton container filled with mustard agent had been incinerated. A public comment period is set to take place before the trial incineration period can begin as the plant ramps up toward full disposal operations for mustard agent.

The mustard agent effort will be the last chemical weapons elimination campaign at Umatilla. It is set to be finished within one to two years (Annette Cary, *Tri-City Herald*, Jan. 26).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100126_9090.php

DISARMAMENT

New Coalition Aims to Promote Chemical Weapons Disarmament, Nonproliferation

Dozens of nongovernmental organisations from around the world are forming an umbrella group to help promote the total elimination of chemical weapons and prevent their use by terrorists (see *GSN*, Dec. 3, 2009).

The Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition, in a mission statement, identifies itself as “an independent, international body whose mission is to support” the global ban on chemical warfare materials “with focused civil society action aimed at achieving full membership of the CWC, the safe and timely elimination of all chemical weapons, preventing the misuse of chemicals for hostile purposes and promoting their peaceful use.”

It is among a scant number of such alliances established to support the aims of a specific nonproliferation treaty, said Paul Walker, head of the Security and Sustainability program at Global Green USA. The environmental organisation helped develop the coalition and will serve as its hub of operations.

The new group has been years in the planning. Supporters believe it can help raise the profile of the pact in regions where membership and implementation of its rules remain a cause of concern.

“All of Europe is a member now, all of the Americas ... The problem areas are really in the Middle East and Asia and a couple countries in Africa,” Walker told *Global Security Newswire*. “So we realized if we were to build a coalition to promote universality we just couldn’t do it with the groups that normally come to the annual meetings” of member nations to the convention.

Representatives from about 35 nongovernmental organisations — most from outside the United States and Western Europe — attended a two-day session last month in The Hague, Netherlands, to prepare the founding document for the coalition. Organizers hope to attract no fewer than 100 groups to the coalition by the end of 2010.

A plan of work through 2012 — the year by which all CWC states must have eliminated any arsenals of prohibited materials — is set to be completed in a couple months, Walker said.

Among the planned activities detailed in the founding document is the preparation of a database on all nations’ activities relative to the convention, including whether they have joined and the size of chemical industries that could be turned to illicit activities. The coalition also intends to produce a yearly report card assessing whether CWC member states are instituting the pact’s requirements at the national level.

Tools for achieving the group’s goals will include public meetings, written commentaries, letter-writing campaigns, interviews, analyses and educational programs, according to the

founding document. The target audience will be officials at all levels of government.

Work would not be limited to that sector, though. The coalition intends to prepare an analysis with recommendations for augmenting the nonproliferation value of the inspection program of the convention’s monitoring body, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. It will also offer “research and expert policy advice” to the organisation, its member states and other parties, according to the group.

Success and Challenges

The Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force in 1997, prohibiting development, production, stockpiling, use or transfer of warfare materials such as mustard blister agent and the nerve agents VX and sarin. There are 188 member states, covering 98 percent of the landmass of the Earth.

Three nations — Albania, India and a country that is never officially identified but widely believed to be South Korea — have eliminated their stockpiles of banned materials. Disposal operations are continuing in Russia and the United States, and Iraq and Libya have pledged to destroy their chemical weapons.

“The CWC is often considered to be the most successful of the WMD treaties, and arguably that is the case,” according to Angela Woodward, program director for national implementation at the London-based Verification Research, Training and Information Center, which helped establish the coalition. “But there remain certain significant problems with the convention which states parties have utterly failed to deal with, such as noncompliance issues (like ‘nonlethal weapons’) or instigating the on-site inspection mechanism” (see *GSN*, Nov. 6, 2009).

“When states parties, and the membership organisation they created for the convention, cannot deal with these problems, it is civil society’s responsibility to air these problems and constructively work towards finding solutions to them,” she told *GSN* by e-mail.

Universality of the convention remains a major issue. Just seven nations have yet to join: Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia and Syria. In that list of nations is one — Egypt — that is known to have used chemical weapons in conflict, and two — North Korea and Syria — that are suspected of housing chemical stockpiles.

The Middle Eastern states are probably the most likely to join the convention in the near future, and the region will host the coalition's next major meeting, Walker said. The hope is to persuade participating nongovernmental groups from the area to promote universality and other CWC issues in their home states through contact with the public and private sectors and the media.

Similar sessions in East Asia and other regions would follow.

The group also hopes through a program of outreach to convince Iraq, Libya, Russia and the United States to conduct "safe, sound and timely destruction of chemical weapons," it said in the initial document. It will further seek to "promote the safe and environmentally sound use of chemicals for peaceful purposes."

Coalition participants might have contacts beyond those possessed by governments who could help push forward the organisation's disarmament objectives, Walker said. He also described an effort that might involve some pressure on nations to fully implement the treaty.

"This whole effort in international security and arms control and disarmament is really a body contact and, in a body-contact sport, you have to make bodily contact," Walker said. "Our efforts are really to go into the regions themselves, raise the issues publicly, more so than probably the OPCW and government agencies can, because most of this is all quiet, backroom diplomacy."

The Hague-based verification organisation has thrown its support behind the new group.

Both the organisation and its member states can "benefit from outside voices that can point out faults in the system," said OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan. "There's a lot of things that go unsaid in more formal venues."

The U.S. State Department said it was familiar with the coalition but that it was too early to consider its value.

Walker said the coalition expects to have three to four part-time employees and an annual budget of between \$250,000 and \$300,000 for staff, meetings and travel for coalition participants. The hope is that foundations and convention states will provide the funding, he said.

"I'm feeling positive," Woodward stated. "The CWCC members will be encouraged and supported to work towards the coalition's goals. Some will be easier to achieve than others. But at the very least, the activities of those NGOs who are already working in support of the CWC can be amplified through membership of a coalition — the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts."

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100122_8824.php

Last Two U.S. Chemical Weapons Disposal Sites Funded at \$550M

Funding for preparation of the last two U.S. installations set to begin destruction of their chemical weapon stockpiles received a significant boost in the fiscal 2010 budget — roughly 30 percent over last year's allowance.

The major appropriations hike comes as Washington looks to demonstrate to the international community that it is maintaining a good faith effort to finish destroying its chemical arsenal soon as possible, even if there is no chance of meeting the Chemical Weapons Convention deadline of April 2012.

The Defense Department's Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives program

received \$550 million in fiscal 2010, which began on Oct. 1 of last year. Funding was fully set only last month.

The ACWA program is in charge of munitions destruction operations at the Pueblo Chemical Depot in Colorado and the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky. The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency has conducted disposal work at the remaining seven other stockpile sites.

To date, the Pentagon has destroyed more than 70 percent of the country's original declared arsenal of 31,500 tons of chemical warfare materials. Stockpiles at Pueblo and Blue Grass represent 10 percent of the stockpile and are respectively expected to be destroyed by 2017 and 2021— meaning both would miss the already-extended international disposal deadline and the Kentucky site would continue operations past the congressionally mandated end date of 2017.

After five or six years of being “grossly underfunded” during the Bush administration “to the real credit of the Obama administration, they came in for the FY 10 defense request and agreed to plus up the [ACWA] construction moneys by a couple hundred million dollars,” said Paul Walker, director of the Security and Sustainability program at the environmental organisation Global Green USA (see *GSN*, April 29, 2009).

It remains to be seen whether the higher funding level will be maintained. ACWA officials said it would not be appropriate to disclose the fiscal 2011 budget request until it is advertised in President Barack Obama's spending proposal to Congress at the beginning of February.

“We're guardedly optimistic but certainly pleased with finally realizing full funding of the ACWA project at least in fiscal 2010,” said Craig Williams, co-chairman of the Kentucky Chemical Demilitarization Citizens' Advisory Commission.

Lawmakers in Colorado and Kentucky have pressed for more money for chemical agent neutralization sites, and Defense Secretary Robert Gates requested \$545 million to cover

construction, administrative and research and development costs, officials and observers said. Congress added another \$5 million.

No amount of funding is expected to allow disposal work to accelerate to the point of meeting the Chemical Weapons Convention schedule or even Congress' 2017 mandate.

“We clearly cannot make 2012,” said ACWA Program Manager Kevin Flamm. “As much as we would love to be in that situation, that just is not in the realm of possibility.”

The program has been constrained by funding levels and setbacks in development of the disposal facilities, along with legal restrictions that would make it impossible to transfer the Colorado and Kentucky stockpiles to states with operating disarmament facilities.

The latest funding does, though, allow the Pentagon to push ahead with awarding some major construction contracts. That will support its aim to finish work at Pueblo in 2017 rather than the earlier anticipated date of 2020 and at Blue Grass in 2021 rather than 2023.

“It'll be very important for the Obama administration to continue this [ACWA] funding so that the construction does get done in a timely way and the facilities get fully systematized,” Walker said. “Hopefully in less than a decade from now we can declare the whole U.S chemical weapons stockpile completely gone.”

Deadline Issues

The United States joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, the year the pact entered into force. Like the 187 other member nations, it has pledged not to develop, produce, stockpile or use banned materials such as mustard blister agent or sarin nerve agent.

All parties to the convention were supposed to have destroyed any chemical stockpiles by April 2007. Several received schedule extensions, with the United States successfully requesting the maximum five-year allowance.

Congress entered the fray three years ago with its own demand as it became increasingly apparent that the country would not be able to make the deadline.

In its efforts to catch up to lawmakers' demand for full chemical disarmament by 2017, the ACWA program is considering new options to speed weapons disposal schedules. Washington is also working to demonstrate to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the monitoring agency for the convention, that it is sincerely striving to destroy its chemical agents as quickly as possible.

Defense officials are searching for technological ways to bridge an anticipated gap in disposal work so that operations can proceed continuously. In December, ACWA representatives briefed residents near Pueblo and Blue Grass on their proposal to use a method called Explosive Destruction Technology to eliminate some munitions at both installations (see *GSN*, Dec. 9, 2009).

"We're looking at how we can augment the facilities to provide additional destruction capability at both sites," Flamm told *Global Security Newswire*.

Under the current schedule, there are two projected periods when no disposal work would be going on in the country. The first gap is projected to begin in January 2012 when the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency finishes operations and end in January 2015 when the chemical neutralization facility at Pueblo comes online. The second break is projected to last from December 2017 to October 2018 — the time between the point at which the Pueblo site finishes work and the Blue Grass facility comes online.

Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives officials are proposing to use mobile Explosive Destruction Technology systems that would allow disposal operations to begin at Pueblo in 2012 while the full Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant there is still under construction.

Flamm said officials are considering several EDT options that include a trailer-mounted

mobile system used by the U.S. Army for years to destroy recovered chemical munitions and the commercial DAVINCH system that has been employed in Japan and Belgium.

"We're looking at using one or a combination of these systems at Pueblo and Blue Grass to allow us to begin destruction operations prior to the main facilities going operational," Flamm said. "This does several things: it allows for continuity in destruction operations with respect to the national programs. Secondly, it allows us to potentially complete destruction operations earlier."

Using explosive technologies would be expected to shorten disposal work by months, not years, Flamm said.

The technology might be applied to 15 percent of the chemical weapons stockpiles at each site, according to Flamm. Explosive technology is being considered for 125,000 mustard agent-filled munitions in Colorado and 15,000 mustard- and nerve-agent filled projectiles in Kentucky.

Congressionally mandated citizens' advisory commissions in both states have opposed the use of the technology beyond the small amount of munitions deemed too dangerous to send through the agent neutralization process.

"As far as we're concerned six months is nothing," Colorado Chemical Demilitarization Citizens' Advisory Commission Chairwoman Irene Kornelly said of the anticipated time savings. "Not when you've been waiting since 1994 to get this process done. Six months is a joke. Six months is nothing in this process."

In a letter, to ACWA officials, the Colorado panel said it could not "endorse any specific EDT system for use at [Pueblo] at this time due to a lack of information about the technical capabilities of the systems, reliability and maintenance concerns and the environmental impacts and compliance of any such system within the U.S."

WilliamssaidtheKentuckyadvisorycommission was presently opposed to the proposal but

would wait and see if and how it was applied in Colorado before objecting further.

“As far as the acceptability of an explosive detonation technology, we remain unconvinced that it will meet the [environmental and health] criteria required but the jury’s still out on that,” said Williams, who also heads the Kentucky-based watchdog Chemical Weapons Working Group.

An ACWA assessment on the feasibility of using Explosive Destruction Technology has been sent to the Defense Department for review.

Army Disposal Work Continues

Progress on destroying the other 90 percent of the United States chemical weapons stockpile continues relatively unabated. As of Jan. 20, the Army had eliminated 22,263 tons of chemical agent — 70.7 percent of the United State’s original declared tonnage, according to Chemical Materials Agency spokesman Greg Mahall.

The agency’s fiscal 2010 budget is \$1.56 billion. That is down slightly from the agency’s fiscal 2009 budget of \$1.6 billion (see **GSN**, Nov. 6, 2008). Approximately \$1.15 billion of this year’s funding is set to go to operations and maintenance, Mahall said.

Three of the agency’s seven sites have completed their work. Weapons disposal operations continue at the Anniston Army Depot in Alabama, the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas, the Umatilla Chemical Depot in Oregon and the Deseret Chemical Depot in Utah.

The Army’s working estimates for disposal work to be finished is: June 2013 for Utah; January 2013 for Umatilla; December 2012 for Anniston; and May 2011 for Pine Bluff, according to Mahall.

“Caveat all of those dates,” Mahall said, adding that the Army was working on moving them all forward. “Right now, our prognosis seems to indicate that we feel very confident

that we’ll meet the 2012 deadline at those four sites.”

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100126_6522.php

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Officials fear toxic ingredient in Botox [Botulinum toxin] could become terrorist tool

Last year, [Ken] Coleman and fellow researcher Raymond Zilinskas set out to test whether militant groups could easily exploit the counterfeit Botox network to obtain materials for a bioterrorism attack. In a project sponsored by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, [the] two scientists found that a biologist with a master’s degree and \$2,000 worth of equipment could easily make a gram of pure toxin, an amount equal to the weight of a small paper clip but enough, in theory, to kill thousands of people. Obtaining the most lethal strain of the bacterium might have posed a significant hurdle for would-be terrorists in the recent past. But today, the prospect of tapping into the multibillion-dollar market for anti-wrinkle drugs has spawned an underground network of suppliers and distributors who do most of their transactions online, the researchers found.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/24/AR2010012403013.html>

Nunn-Lugar Cooperative releases 2009 report

A summary of the progress of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction programs for 2009 has been released by U.S. Sen. Dick Lugar.

To date, Nunn-Lugar has made substantial progress in combating the global risk of biological weapons, neutralizing chemical weapons, containing the nuclear threat and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

“Malefactors in the world want to use weapons of mass destruction to terrorize American citizens, harm our soldiers deployed around the world, and attack our partner countries,” Lugar said. “Proliferation of WMD remains the number one national security threat facing the United States and the international community. In 2009, the Nunn-Lugar program continued to make us safer by achieving meaningful progress in the destruction and dismantlement of massive Soviet weapons systems and the facilities that developed them. There is much more work to do in combating biological, nuclear, and chemical threats through Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat reduction and the global expansion of the Nunn-Lugar program.”

According to the 2009 Nunn-Lugar Report Card, three biological stations - making a program total of 19 - were built in 2009 to act as the front-line of defense in biological pathogen research and monitoring.

Additionally, construction began on two Central Reference Laboratories in Georgia and Azerbaijan, which will provide consolidated, safe and secure storage for pathogens and highly infectious disease strains inherited from the former Soviet Union.

The CRLs will also house near real-time detection and reporting of a bio-terrorist attack, allowing for an effective and timely response.

Lugar is also expected to announce this week that the Nunn-Lugar program will expand beyond the former Soviet Union and act as a Nunn-Lugar Global Security Cooperation to meet unexpected threats worldwide.

“We hope for and anticipate constructive movement in arms control on the world’s biggest stages,” Lugar said. “But we should be cautious in our estimates of the influence of U.S. arsenal cuts on the behavior of smaller nuclear powers and aspirants. I believe that our success in encouraging others to abandon weapons or limit their expansion will depend much more on the hard work of expanding arms control and non-proliferation tools and addressing regional circumstances that influence the

choices of governments related to weapons of mass destruction.”

<http://www.bioprepwatch.com/news/211830-nunn-lugar-cooperative-releases-2009-report>

Panel: US not ready for bioterrorist attack

While experts say the United States is woefully unprepared to deal with a biological attack, authorities in Los Angeles County insist the region has a system in place to prevent and respond to germ attacks.

A Congressional panel Tuesday released a report that gave the United States an “F” for its readiness to respond to a biological attack. The report also gave failing grades for government reform and for efforts to recruit and train anti-terrorism experts.

While the report said the government was doing a good job in some areas related to counter-terrorism, it concluded that safety officials do not grasp the serious threat from biological attacks.

“As the delayed response to H1N1 has demonstrated, the United States is woefully behind in its capability to rapidly produce vaccines and therapeutics, essential steps for adequately responding to a biological threat, whether natural or man-made,” read the report from the Commission on Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism.

From prevention of attacks to treatment of infected people “virtually all links are weak,” the report stated.

The Congressional report found that al-Qaida was likely to try to use chemical weapons.

“If al-Qaida recruits skilled bioscientists, it will acquire the capability to develop and use biological weapons,” the report stated.

In Los Angeles County, emergency responders insisted local governments are relatively well-

prepared for attacks from germs or other biological agents.

Due to the constant threat of earthquakes, Southern California's emergency workers are used to reacting quickly to calamity, said Steve Whitmore, a spokesman for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The county's Terrorism Early Warning Group would assess threats and almost immediately get information out to street cops, firefighters and public works staffs, Whitmore said.

The Sheriff's Department would be the lead agency in coordinating any such response, he said.

The department this month paid \$10,000 for Johnny Ringo, a dog deputies claim can sniff out biological weapons.

The dog is the "only entity in the world" that can detect tiny concentrations of such weapons, Whitmore said.

"We don't have to wait for this to be released," he said. "We can find this stuff before it gets out."

Unlike Johnny Ringo, machines made to detect biological agents would have trouble sorting out and finding all the different harmful compounds, said Jack Beauchamp, a professor of chemistry at Caltech.

"There's been a lot work on technology to develop instruments that would target very specific agents, for instance, anthrax," he said. "But again, there's the variety of agents that one can employ. There's no one instrument that could catch everything."

A well-funded laboratory could indeed produce dangerous chemicals or germs, Beauchamp said.

"If you had enough money, it would certainly be possible," he said.

While most cities have crafted plans to respond to earthquakes, biological attacks present

unique challenges, said Fred Latham, city manager of Santa Fe Springs.

The city is home to several chemical processing plants, which prompted the city's staff to write a disaster playbook. Included in the manual is a section on biological attacks, Latham said.

"Bio and chemical have a very, very unique set of issues," Latham said.

The threat is invisible, hard to notice right away and can sometimes pass from person to person.

"It's unique in terms of how the first responders handle the incident," he said. "(Biological attacks) have broader implications. No. 1, it's invisible, and No. 2 it could have consequences beyond the local area."

Santa Fe Springs as recently as eight months ago conducted a biological attack drill, Latham said.

While drills, communications systems and super dogs are helpful, the federal report criticized the nation's ability to quickly produce vaccines and treatments for illnesses.

For instance, there is not a good vaccine for the treatment of anthrax, said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, the county's public health officer.

Once people inhale anthrax spores, they quickly become sick and can die without rapid treatment, he said.

"We do need, nationally, a much better vaccine against anthrax," he said. "The one we have now is full of side effects and isn't that effective."

Nonetheless, the county has made progress since the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, he said.

The county has better stockpiles of vaccines, and laboratories can more quickly identify toxins, he said.

And the county learned a lot about quickly handing out vaccines during last year's swine flu scare, he said.

“Los Angeles County is definitely not failing,” he said. “This report just reinforces the importance of protecting public health - it has to always be job No. 1.”

http://www.whittierdailynews.com/news/ci_14273038

Al-Qaeda seeks WMD, US unprepared: reports

The United States has not done enough to protect the country against the threat of weapons of mass destruction even as Al-Qaeda appears intent on staging a large-scale attack, reports said.

A bipartisan panel warned that the government had failed to adopt measures to counter the danger posed by extremists using WMD, saying the administration lacked plans for a rapid response to a possible biological attack.

“Nearly a decade after September 11, 2001, one year after our original report, and one month after the Christmas Day bombing attempt, the United States is failing to address several urgent threats, especially bioterrorism,” said former senator Bob Graham, chair of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism.

He said that Washington no longer had “the luxury of a slow learning curve, when we know Al-Qaeda is interested in bioweapons.”

In its “report card,” the commission also gave the federal government low marks for failing to recruit a new generation of national security experts and for failing to improve congressional oversight of intelligence and homeland security agencies.

The findings came as a former CIA officer wrote in a report that Al-Qaeda’s leaders have been working methodically since the 1990s to secure weapons that could inflict massive bloodshed.

Although other extremists had looked into obtaining such weapons, Al-Qaeda “is the only group known to be pursuing a long-

term, persistent and systematic approach to developing weapons to be used in mass casualty attacks,” wrote Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, who led the CIA’s WMD department.

He acknowledged that the failure to find WMD in Iraq had damaged the US government’s credibility and had spread skepticism about the threat posed by Al-Qaeda getting its hands on nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.

“That said, WMD terrorism is not Iraqi WMD,” he wrote in the report released by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

He argued that intelligence on Al-Qaeda’s activities was much more extensive and reliable than the information about Saddam Hussein’s weapons programs.

His report said Al-Qaeda’s efforts to develop biological and nuclear weapons were not “empty rhetoric” and that the group’s leaders appeared to have ruled out smaller-scale attacks with simpler devices.

“If Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants had been interested in employing crude chemical, biological and radiological materials in small-scale attacks, there is little doubt they could have done so by now,” he wrote.

In a “highly compartmentalized” operation, Al-Qaeda had pursued parallel tracks to try to secure the destructive weapons, building a biological lab and separately acquiring strains of anthrax bacteria before the attacks of September 11, 2001, the report said.

The anthrax was apparently never successfully placed in a weapon and scientists working at a lab in Afghanistan had to flee when US-led forces invaded after the 9/11 attacks, it said.

In 2003, US officials feared that Al-Qaeda was on the verge of obtaining atomic weapons after intercepting a message from a Saudi operative referring to plans to secure Russian nuclear devices.

The sensitive intelligence was passed on to Riyadh and the Saudi government then arrested Al-Qaeda suspects in a major crackdown.

But US officials were never sure if the nuclear plot was disrupted or merely pushed underground.

The former CIA officer also said Al-Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in 2003 had called off plans for a chemical attack on New York's subways "for something better," a cryptic remark that remains a mystery.

The bipartisan commission on the WMD threat, created by Congress, had said in its initial report in December 2008 that it was "more likely than not" that a terror attack using weapons of mass destruction would be carried out somewhere in the world by the end of 2013.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gLAajt6TxV5B4jBdUh_epRS8CKBg

Iraq executes Chemical Ali

Ali Hassan al-Majid was notorious for the gassing of more than 5,000 Kurds in 1988 and other brutal campaigns

Saddam Hussein's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, or Chemical Ali, listens to prosecution evidence during his genocide trial. Photograph: Darko Vojinovic/AP

Ali Hassan al-Majid, better known as Chemical Ali, was executed today for crimes against humanity in Iraq's highest profile execution since Saddam Hussein was hanged three years ago.

"The death sentence against Ali Hassan al-Majid has been carried out," said Ali al-Dabbagh, an Iraqi government spokesman.

Dabbagh said Majid was not subjected to any abuse during the execution – unlike Saddam, who was taunted on the gallows in December 2006.

"Everyone abided by the government's instructions and the convicted was not subjected to any breach, chanting, abuse words or insults," Dabbagh said.

The 68-year-old former spy chief and first cousin of Saddam had been sentenced to death on January 17 for ordering the gassing of more than 5,000 Kurds in the northern Iraqi town of Halabja near the Iranian border in 1988. Other officials in Saddam's regime have received jail terms for their roles in the attack.

Majid, one of Saddam's most notorious henchmen during the brutal three-decade reign of the Ba'athists, had received three previous death sentences for atrocities committed during Saddam's rule, particularly in government campaigns against the Kurds in the 1980s and the Shias in the 1990s.

Majid first ordered the use of chemical weapons – mustard gas, sarin and VX – in 1987, culminating in the attack on Halabja. By the end of the Kurdish campaign in 1988 about 4,000 villages had been destroyed, an estimated 180,000 Kurds killed and about 1.5 million deported.

He was nicknamed Chemical Ali by Iraqi Kurds, who also called him the Butcher of Kurdistan

Majid was captured after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Convicted in June 2007, he was sentenced to death for crimes committed in the al-Anfal campaign against the Kurds. His appeal was rejected on 4 September 2007 and he was sentenced to death for the fourth time, by hanging, on 17 January 2010.

Majid, who owed his rise to family ties with Saddam, played a key role in the purge of the Ba'ath party in 1979, when Saddam, formally installed as head of state, sat on the stage of an auditorium and watched "traitors" being led away to their deaths after their names were called out.

In August 1990, after the invasion of Kuwait, Majid was appointed military governor of what Saddam considered to be Iraq's "19th province". But Saddam replaced him three months later for fear his brutal reputation was strengthening the hand of Kuwait's allies. When Iraqi forces were pushed out of Kuwait by a US-led coalition, Majid was appointed interior

minister to help stamp out the Shia rebellion in southern Iraq.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/25/chemical-ali-execution-iraq-kurd>

Compiled by: Wg. Cdr. Ajey Lele,
Dr. Monalisa Joshi and Gunjan Singh

Swine Flu deaths in India rises to 1229: Report

Eight more people have died of Swine Flu in India, taking the toll due to the deadliest flu in the country so far to 1229.

Two of these deaths - one each in Maharashtra and Gujarat - were reported during Sunday. Besides, six deaths occurred in recent days - five in Gujarat and one in Maharashtra, said an official statement of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Of the total swine flu deaths in the country so far, Maharashtra now accounts for 317, while 236 lives have been lost in Gujarat, 176 in Rajasthan, 141 in Karnataka, 93 in Delhi, 52 in Andhra Pradesh, 38 in Punjab, 36 each in Kerala and Haryana, 22 in Madhya Pradesh, 18 in Uttar Pradesh, 13 in Uttarakhand, 8 each in Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh, 7 in Tamil Nadu, 6 each in Chhattisgarh and Puducherry, 5 in Goa, 4 in Jammu & Kashmir, 3 in Orissa, 2 in Assam and 1 each in Mizoram and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

Meanwhile, 35 new cases of swine flu were reported from different parts of India, including 20 in Maharashtra, 5 each in Gujarat and Karnataka, 2 each in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan and 1 in Delhi, said the statement.

With these, the total number of laboratory-confirmed cases of the virus reported in the country so far has gone up to 28,810, the statement added.

Till date, samples from 123079 persons have been tested for Swine Flu in Government Laboratories and a few private Laboratories across the country and 28810(23.40 per cent) of them have been found positive.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/news/2010/02/sec-100201-irna02.htm>