

Chemical Weapons and the Iran-Iraq War

**A discussion of the UN Security Council's response
to the use of gas in the Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988**



MA Thesis in History
Randi Hunshamar Øygarden
Department of AHKR
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1. Introduction

"I am not afraid of anything, except for God and poison gas."

Iraqi officer.¹

The Iran-Iraq war was the longest interstate war in the 20th century, and lasted from 1980 to 1988. When the war was over, none of the strategic aims the two belligerents had had in the initial phases of the war were achieved. The war showed how devastating war can be, and the Iraqi and the Iranian population became victims of death, horror and suffering. An estimated 200,000 Iraqis and 500,000 Iranians lost their lives.² At least twice as many were injured. Iraq estimated that 30,000 Iranians lost their lives because of chemical weapons.³ Many more were injured, and some suffers from injuries related to chemical weapons today as well. Gas had not been used in warfare in such an extent since World War I, but during the Iran-Iraq war chemical weapons were used frequently.

The first serious allegations of use of chemical weapons came in 1983, when Iranian troops became victims to poisonous gas. Incidents of use of gas followed the next years until the end of the war, and all signs pointed to Iraq as the violator of the Geneva Protocol, which forbids the use of chemical weapons.

How could Iraq use chemical weapons frequently for five years without the Security Council interfering? This raises questions about the role of the United Nations Security Council in the Iran-Iraq war. This thesis therefore discusses the Security Council's responses to the use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war. The war started a year after the Islamic revolution in Iran, and a year after Saddam Hussein took power in Iraq. Did these events influence the Security Council's responses to the use of chemical weapons? Did other factors, such as political alliances, individual member state's political agendas, financial reasons, or strategic reasons play a part in the Security Council's politics toward the use of chemical weapons? This thesis will look into these aspects, and discuss how the Security Council responded to the use of chemical weapon and what reasons that lay behind their response.

¹ As quoted in Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 16.

² Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 192-193. The numbers are estimates.

³ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 109.

Research Questions

The topic is narrowed by two specific research questions to approach the subject in a constructive way. The first research question is:

How did the United Nations Security Council respond to the use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war?

The second research question elaborates on the findings of the first question:

Why did the Security Council respond the way it did?

Some notes should be made on the content and structure of the thesis.

The Iran-Iraq War started in 1980, but the first reliable reports of the use of chemical weapons appeared three years later, and 1983 is thus the starting point of the research and discussion of the research questions. The UN was not officially notified about it before 1983 either.

The thesis is written chronologically, because the use of chemical weapons must be seen in connection to the dynamics of the war, and the responses of the Security Council. It will also be argued that the Security Council's responses must be seen in connection with the events in the war. A chronological presentation also shows how the use of chemical weapons developed through the war.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters. Each chapter presents a stage of the use of chemical weapons in the war.

Hypotheses

Based on general knowledge about the Iran-Iraq war and on the context of it, several hypotheses were formulated as possible answers to the research questions before research was conducted.

A hypothesis to the first research question, *How did the UN Security Council respond to the use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war?*, is:

The Security Council did not respond hard enough to stop the use of chemical weapons.

It is reasonable to believe that the UN did not respond decisively hard enough to prevent Iraq from using chemical weapons, since they were used repeatedly throughout war.

It is expected that the Security Council condemned Iraq for the use of chemical weapons, but that it is unlikely that the Council implemented any effective measures to stop the use of chemical weapons.

This research question must be elaborated with further hypotheses. The Security Council did not respond decisively hard enough, because:

1. The members of the Security Council disagreed on what measures which should be taken to punish and prevent further use of chemical weapons.

It is of great importance that the Iran-Iraq war took place in a world politically dominated by the Cold War, where two of the permanent members of the Security Council had fundamental conflicting interests and ideologies. The two states, the US and the USSR, and a hypothesis is that they disagreed on what measures which should be taken to punish and prevent further use. A strong political response would demand close cooperation on what decisions that should be made, which was difficult at the time. When two of its members disagreed on what to do, it paralysed the Security Council to act decisively and stop the use of chemical weapons.

2. The use of chemical weapons was perceived as a minor problem in a bigger picture.

Another hypothesis is that the use of chemical weapons was perceived as a minor problem in a bigger picture for the Security Council. The two superpowers were

occupied with their own problems, and none of them were interested in escalating their internal conflicts by getting involved in the Iran-Iraq war.

3. The Security Council did not want to implement efficient measures against the use of chemical weapons, because the Council favoured Iraq over Iran.

There was a new political situation in the region. The regime in Iran was difficult to predict, and the Iranian regime challenged and criticised other countries in the region, countries in the West, and communist ideology. An Iranian victory would mean a new, unpredictable situation in the Middle East for the superpowers. The Soviet Union could lose its ally Iraq, and the US' ally Saudi Arabia could be in danger. A hypothesis is therefore that the Security Council did not want to implement efficient measures against the use of chemical weapons, because the Council's member states, especially the US and the Soviet Union, favoured Iraq over Iran.

4. Iraq cooperated with the Security Council.

Iraq was willing to negotiate a peace after the initial offensive, while Iran wished to continue the war to win. A hypothesis is therefore that the Council did not do anything about the issue of chemical weapons, because they did not want to alienate Iraq as well. Peace would be further away if neither of the belligerents were interested in cooperation with the Security Council regarding peace.

Historiography, Sources and Methods

Historiography

There is a rich literature on the Iran-Iraq war. Many journalists and military strategists published analyses of the war dynamics during the conflict and in the immediate aftermath. Their main focus was to describe what happened in the war, and the international impact and implications of it.⁴

The Gulf war (1990 -1991) overshadowed the Iran-Iraq war, especially in American research literature in the 1990s. Some historians drew lines between the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf war, and some focused on the US' role in the conflicts.⁵

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to a renewed historical focus on Iraq in Western research literature, and it also reignited an interest for the Iran-Iraq war. The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime led to an opening of previously closed Iraqi documents, and it has provided researchers with new information, which has contributed to a changed understanding of the Iran-Iraq war.⁶ Other recent research conducted by historians focuses much more on specific areas of the war, e.g. the role of the Kurds and the role of third party states in the war, than on the entire war.⁷ However, when studying secondary literature on the Iran-Iraq war, there was surprisingly little literature in the field of chemical weapons. The use of chemical weapons was included in descriptions of the warfare, but was rarely given specific attention or treated as a field in its own right. There was in other words room for an analysis with focus on the use of chemical weapons, and how the Security Council responded to the use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war, and why the Council responded the way it did.

⁴ E.g. Anthony Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner's *The Lessons of Modern Warfare vol. II: The Iran-Iraq War*, Dilip Hiro's *The Longest War* and Christopher C. Joyner's *The Persian Gulf War. Lessons for Strategy, Law and Diplomacy*.

⁵ E.g. Adam Tarock's *The Superpower's Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*.

⁶ E.g. Nigel Ashton and Bryan Gibson's *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives*

⁷ E.g. Joost R. Hilterman's *A Poisonous Affair* and James D. Blight's *Becoming Enemies: US-Iran relations and the Iran-Iraq war, 1979-1988*.

Sources

The approach to the research questions has been problem-oriented, i.e. specific research questions were formulated first, and sources have been found afterwards.⁸

The primary sources of this thesis are mainly the official records of the Security Council. Only the Security Council documents regarding the Iran-Iraq war and chemical weapons have been studied. The official records include letters to and from the Secretary-General and member states, Security Council resolutions, verbatim records from Council meetings, statements, notes and reports.

It is important to be aware of the limits of the official records of the Security Council. They include only the official records, and not what was discussed behind closed doors as documents and meeting records are classified according to content.⁹ The real opinions of the member states and the Secretary-General might therefore be hidden, and it has therefore been useful to look in other directions to spot their stands. This point will be elaborated on in the paragraph regarding secondary sources. . It should be noted that incidents where there are no responses from the Security Council also answers the research questions.

Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's own memoirs have been an additional primary source of information, which has helped to understand the actions of both him and the Security Council. The memoirs have to be read critically as well, since they are written by Pérez de Cuéllar himself and are thus influenced by his opinions and his views in retrospect of the war. The memoirs are not complete, and he has also had the possibility to edit his memoirs, and leave out relative information and other details he has found unsuitable.

As mentioned above, the Council's response has to be understood in terms of the dynamics of the war and of third party states' interests in the area. Secondary literature has provided background information, and it has helped to understand why the Security Council responded the way it did, especially in cases where the official records of the Security Council have been inadequate. Some of the secondary literature deserves extra attention:

⁸ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 120.

⁹ UN, "Editorial Manual: Categories of Distribution of Documents and Meeting Records."

Andrea Charron's book *UN Sanctions and Conflicts: Responding to Peace and Security Threats* has been the basis of the explanation of the mechanisms of the Security Council when they are faced with a conflict. Her book is neutral, reflected and discusses the Security Council in a clear way.

Cordesman and Wagner's *The Lessons of Modern Warfare Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* was published in 1988, but it is still one of the most detailed descriptions on the warfare operations. It has been one of the most useful works in this thesis in the exploration of the events in the war. Robert Johnson's *The Iran-Iraq War*, which was published in 2011 is a more recent contribution to the field. It has also been used as one of the main works in this thesis in mapping the events of the war.

The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War by Adam Tarock has been the main source for understanding why the Security Council responded as it did. The book gives a thorough explanation of interests and actions of the US and the Soviet Union. It was important to use a source that was published in the aftermath of the Cold war, as new information which provided new perspectives of their roles were released after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Joost R. Hilterman's *A Poisonous Affair* from 2007 is the most thorough analysis on chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war. It gives a detailed presentation of the bombing of Halabja, but also a concise description of the events leading up to it as well.

Methods

The research questions and the sources have decided what method that should be used.

The most important method has been critical analysis of sources. Critical analysis of sources is necessary when working with documents, and has been conducted throughout all work with primary sources, but also with secondary sources.

The thesis also has elements of comparison. The responses of the Security Council and the Secretary General are discussed chronologically to see changes and development in their actions. Comparison has also been an important method in exploring *why* the Security Council responded the way it did. Reasons have been discussed, evaluated, compared to each other. Comparison helps explain what has happened systematically and to see changes over time, in this case from 1983 to 1988.

2. Historical background

The History of Chemical Weapons

Chemical weapons are basically toxic chemicals, which are contained in different delivery systems, e.g. missiles or bombs.¹⁰ They are categorized as a weapon of mass destruction, together with biological weapons, nuclear weapons and radioactive weapons, and are thus one of the most damaging types of weapons on earth.

Chemical weapons are categorised into groups according to their qualities, and the most well known are choking agents, blister agents, blood agents, and nerve agents. The qualities of the agents are also reflected in their names. Choking agents attack the respiratory system, nerve agents attack the nervous system, blister agents affect the skin and blood agents attack blood cells.¹¹

It was mainly mustard gas and nerve agents that were used during the Iran-Iraq war. Mustard gas is known as “the king of the war gases”, and got its name from the yellowish colour that it sometimes has, as well as a distinct smell.¹² The effects are often delayed, but when they come they damage tissue in eyes and skin, create blisters and burns, can cause loss of eyesight for a time, and kill if high concentrations are inhaled.¹³ Tabun is a nerve gas, and nerve gases are regarded as worse than mustard gas. They act more quickly, and affect the victim through inhalation or absorption through the skin. Nerve gases attack the nervous system and lead to uncontrollable muscular activity, which can cause loss of the respiratory system, and in the end be lethal. It can also release a poison to accumulate within the body. Nerve gases can also cause dimness of vision, breathing problems, nausea and vomiting. Nerve gases can kill within 15 minutes, but most often within one-two hours, but it depends on the amounts the victims are exposed to.¹⁴

So why are chemical weapons regarded as worse than conventional weapons? First of all, chemical weapons do not only create physical suffering. It is as much feared and exploited for its psychological impact. Chemical weapons with its characteristic impact on victims are dreaded among soldiers who have experienced it, as most of the

¹⁰ OPCW, “Brief Description of Chemical Weapons.”

¹¹ Idem.

¹² Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 15.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Idem.

attacked survive, and rumours about it spread quickly both among soldiers, but also among civilians. Second, chemical weapons spread uncontrolled according to weather conditions and do not differ between soldier and civilian. Third, if one allows chemical weapons to be used in one war, the limits might be pushed further in the next one and other weapons of mass destruction might be the next step. It is therefore important to uphold the norm that chemical weapons should not be used. This argument was crucial during the Iran-Iraq war as the world was in the middle of the Cold War, and is still current today as states fear the implications if hostile groups get their hands on it.

Chemical weapons were used in a major scale for the first time during World War I. France used grenades filled with tear gas in August 1914, but it was the German attack with chlorine gas at Ypres, Belgium, in September the same year.¹⁵ It is estimated that the use of chemical weapons during World War I caused over 1 million casualties and 90,000 deaths, but many of those who were injured suffered from it both physically and psychologically for the rest of their lives.¹⁶

The chemical weapons used during World War I were neither efficient nor did they give any advantage in the overall picture of the war. The weapons were not developed enough, but the use of it during World War I launched serious research and development efforts were made on chemical and biological weapons.¹⁷

In the aftermath of the war, many countries, especially USA, sought an armament reduction as a measure to prevent a new world war. Chemical and biological weapons were a part of the reduction talks, but chemical substances could not be forbidden altogether, because it was crucial in other industries as well, e.g. the pharmaceutical industry. However, it proved difficult to agree on something as long as agreements included disarmament of other arms as well.

The Geneva Protocol

The Washington Treaty of 1921 is an example of how difficult it was to agree on armament reduction. It condemned the use of chemical and biological weapons in war, but the treaty did not come into force. It had several other arms reduction clauses as

¹⁵ OPCW, "Brief History of Chemical Weapons Use"

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 27-40.

well, and France refused to ratify it because it was too comprehensive.¹⁸ The topic remained of current focus, however, and USA seized the opportunity to promote disarmament again when the conference *Control of the International Trade in Arms* was held in Geneva in May 1925. The part that dealt with chemical and biological weapons in the Washington Treaty from 1921 was rewritten, and all other disarmament measures were left out. It proved more successful.

The Geneva Protocol was signed by 44 states 17 June 1925, among them France, Germany, Great Britain and USA.¹⁹ Parties to the Geneva Protocol accepted that asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases in addition to bacteriological methods of warfare were prohibited. Each state was bound to it as soon as it was ratified, and more states signed and ratified the Protocol in the years that followed.²⁰ Even though it was a major achievement, the Geneva Protocol was still a limited agreement, which had many loopholes. The British Professor in Strategic Studies of Leeds University, Edward M. Spiers, emphasises the shortcomings of the Geneva Protocol:

It failed to address R&D (research and development), production, possession or transfer of such weapons, avoided any reference to how the agreement could be verified or enforced, and allowed states who ratified it to enter one or both of the following reservations: first, that it was binding only in relation to other states who were a party to the protocol, and second, that it would cease to be binding whenever enemy states used gas warfare. In effect, the Geneva Protocol became known as a "no first use" agreement.²¹

Since it was only binding in relation to other states parties to it, it did not hinder the use of chemical weapons against groups or organizations without state status. The Protocol did not gain the political weight that USA hoped it would have either. One of the reasons was that the American Senate did not ratify the agreement before 50 years later, in 1975.²² The loopholes also made it possible for states that had made reservations to use chemical or biological weapons against states that were not party to the treaty. Many

¹⁸ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰ UN, "The Geneva Protocol."

²¹ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Warfare*, 50-51.

²² ICRC, "Protocol for the Prohibition for Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. Geneva, 17 June 1925."

colonial powers used chemical agents against rebellions in third world countries in the 1920s and 1930s, but did not break the Geneva Protocol since the colonies had not signed the treaty, or the use of chemical agents were used against rebel groups. Both Iraq and Iran are parties to the Geneva Protocol. Iran ratified it in 1929, while Iraq ratified it in 1931, and Iraq was one of the countries that made reservations on ascending it: Iraq became a party to the Protocol, but was only bound to it towards other states subject to it.²³ This means that Iraq's obligation to it would cease if an enemy power's armed forces or an ally of the enemy did not respect the Protocol.

Chemical weapons after 1925

The interwar years were characterised by political unrest and a Europe in change, and many countries continued their research and development on chemical and biological weapons since the Geneva Protocol did not prohibit research. No state leaders wanted to risk its security if it became involved in a new war where the counterpart had chemical or biological weapons. Even though the weapons had its negative sides, it was also a versatile weapon seen with a military strategist's eyes: it could be launched from planes, tanks and ships, as well as it did not kill everyone in its target zone; it simply put the counterpart out of play both in defensive and offensive warfare.²⁴

Despite all the shortcomings, the Geneva Protocol was respected during the following decades, and neither the Allies nor the Axis used chemical weapons during the Second World War, but the Cold War that followed opened for further research on such weapons. In the Cold War period, both USA and the Soviet Union intensified its chemical and biological weapons programmes, and developed huge amounts of sarin and mustard gas in addition to biological weapons. The gases had become more refined and more lethal, and the military had learned from WWI and colonial wars in the third world how to use it tactically. The cold war remained cold, and never turned into a direct-armed conflict between the USA and the Soviet Union. Still, chemical weapons were sold and proliferated to other parts of the world, which would prove fatal.

Iraq had come under military rule in 1958 when General Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the monarchy, and the country was declared a republic. Both the Republic

²³ ICRC, "Iraq's Reservation Made on Accession."

²⁴ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Warfare*, 48.

and the Baathist regime, which seized the power ten years after Qasim's coup, sought to strengthen its power and position in the Middle East, and one of its means was a modernization of the military.²⁵ Iraqi officers had been sent to the Soviet Union in the 1960s to be trained within chemical and biological warfare programmes, and military training facilities were set up around the country so Iraqi soldiers could practice gas warfare. Many Western countries were contacted by Iraq in the 1970s and offered lucrative contracts for equipment and chemicals in return, which could be used to manufacture chemical and biological weapons. Many companies did not want to sell to Iraq and declined the offer, but some accepted the deals, among them German companies. Iraq started production of chemical agents in the beginning of the 1980s, and specialized in mustard gas, and the nerve gasses sarin and tabun.²⁶

The Security Council: Responsibilities and Expectations

The Security Council

The United Nations was founded after World War II, in 1945. The organization's main purposes are to keep peace, establish cooperation and friendship among states, to improve social conditions and human rights. The powers of the United Nations are vested in the Charter, which is accepted by all member states.²⁷ 194 states are members of the UN. Iran and Iraq are two of them.

The Security Council is one of the United Nations' main bodies. The Council's main responsibility is to maintain peace, oversee international law and prevent conflicts. In grave situations, the Security Council can impose sanctions and also authorize the use of force to prevent conflicts or to restore peace.²⁸ The Security Council is as a part of the UN internationally recognized, and is made up of 15 countries from all parts of the world. 10 of them are voted in for a two-year period by the General Assembly, which again consists of the 194 member states.²⁹ The other five members of the Council are permanent members. They are the US, Russia (until 1991 the Soviet Union), the UK,

²⁵ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 144.

²⁶ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 102-103.

²⁷ UN, "UN at a Glance."

²⁸ UN, "The Security Council."

²⁹ As of July 2014. UN, "The Security Council".

China and France. The five permanent members have the power to veto a decision or resolution, and thus have more power than the other member states.³⁰

What can the Security Council do when confronting a conflict?

The General Assembly of the UN had adopted a resolution (37/98D) in 1982, which called for measures to uphold the authority of the Geneva Protocol of 1925.³¹ The Security Council was thus obliged to confront the use of chemical weapons. But what can the Security Council do when they are confronted with a violation of international law? Andrea Charron, Assistant Professor and Deputy-Director of the Centre for Defence and Security Studies at the University of Manitoba, Canada, argues that the Council has five options when confronting a conflict:³²

1. *Do nothing.*
2. *Recommend peaceful methods of dispute settlement as outlined in chapter VI of the Charter, e.g. negotiations, arbitrations, or investigation of a conflict.*
3. *If peace is damaged or international peace is endangered, article 40 may be invoked. It calls upon parties concerned to comply with measures the Council deems necessary.*
4. *If peace is damaged or international peace is endangered, article 41 may be invoked. It adopts measures “short of force”, i.e. sanctions.*
5. *If peace is damaged or international peace is endangered, article 42 may be invoked. It adopts measures, which include the application of armed forces.³³*

In other words, the Security Council has the possibility to take a number of measures to deal with international conflicts, but the most common are missions and sanctions though.³⁴

Sanctions can be both preventive and punitive, and are unlimited in terms of whom it sanctions or what it sanctions. Charron writes that the Council must “tailor the sanction to suit the conflict” and the conflict dictates what sanctions that should be

³⁰ UNSC, “Voting System and Records.” 20.10.2014.

³¹ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 141.

³² University of Manitoba, “Dr. Andrea Charron.”

³³ Charron, *UN Sanctions and Conflict*, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

taken.³⁵ However, for a decision or a measure to be implemented, it needs 9 affirmative votes out of 15 votes and no vetoes by the permanent members.³⁶ Unanimous agreement among the permanent members is therefore crucial. It should also be mentioned that states are not compelled to operate sanctions or measures applied by the Council.

So what can the Security Council do when international law, like the Geneva Protocol is violated? Basically, the Council has the power to take whatever measure it finds suitable. Charron argues that the measure must tailor the conflict, and the same goes with international law: the measure must tailor the violation and the context it has been committed in. In the case of the Iran-Iraq war where the Geneva Protocol was violated, the Council could for instance have encouraged UN member states not to sell chemical component to Iraq. It is, as Charron's five points show, natural to start with a light measure, and then increase the pressure and restore to harder means if the violator does not compel to the decisions of the Security Council.

The Secretary-General's role

The Secretary-General is the chief administrative officer of the entire UN, and works in close cooperation with the Security Council. It is the Secretary-General who shall bring matters he considers as a threat to international peace and security to the Security Council. The Security Council and other main bodies of the UN can entrust him functions, which he has to act according to.³⁷ The role of the Secretary-General is in other words wide and complex, and it is very much up to each individual Secretary-General to understand and evaluate what the role carries.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar from Peru was Secretary-General in the period discussed in this thesis, i.e. 1983-1988. Pérez de Cuéllar assumed office in 1982, succeeding Kurt Waldheim from Austria, and resigned in 1991.³⁸ As will be seen in this thesis, the Secretary-General played a significant role in the issue of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war.

³⁵ Charron, *UN Sanctions and Conflict*, 1.

³⁶ UNSC, "Voting System and Records."

³⁷ UN, "The Role of the Secretary-General."

³⁸ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, front flap.

The Iran-Iraq War

The war between Iran and Iraq began in September 1980, and was a result of both complex underlying causes and immediate causes.

The border between Iran and Iraq had been a subject of dispute since the 16th century when Iraq came under Ottoman rule, and the Shatt al-Arab, an important waterway on the southern border of the two countries, was the core of the problem.³⁹ The river was important for both countries in terms of economic and strategic value, and both countries claimed control rights over it. The Shatt al Arab was especially important to Iraq. Iraq has a short coastline, and the Shatt al Arab was Iraq's only direct outlet into the Persian Gulf. Its importance increased when oil was discovered in the 1920s, and the Shatt became an important communication line.⁴⁰



Map 1: Southern Iraq. Source: Google Maps.

³⁹ In Farsi: Arvand Rud.

⁴⁰ Ingebrigtsen, *Konflikten mellom Iran og Irak*, 14.

Another factor, which was an underlying cause, was the ethnic difference between the two countries. The Iranians are Persians, a people with Indo-European roots, and who speak Persian, while Iraqis are Arabs and speak Arabic. In addition, religious differences have contributed to strain the tensions between the two countries. 60-65 % of the Iraqi population are Shia Muslims, but 32-37 % are Sunni, while the population of Iran are mainly Shia Muslims.⁴¹

Both countries also have a considerable population of Kurds, which has caused tensions between the two neighbours in the 20th century. When the Ottoman Empire was dissolved after WWI the Kurdish areas in what today are in Turkey, Iran and Iraq were divided. The creation of Iraq led to unrest among the Kurds, and the unrest turned into rebellion against Iraqi authorities in the 1960s. Iraq blamed Iran for supporting the Kurds up against Baghdad, while Iran blamed Iraq for supporting Iranian Kurds against Tehran. The allegations were rooted in reality, and both countries used the strategy repeatedly during the 20th century.⁴²

The relationship between Iran and Iraq was not only dominated by hostilities. There were also periods of cooperation and peace between the two neighbours. Border disputes and the Kurdish problem were settled in the 1975 Algiers Agreement. It was a peace agreement negotiated by Egypt, which made the Iranian shah to stop supporting the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), while Iraq had to accept thalweg (the median line) of Shatt al Arab as the border. That way both countries were allowed to use the waterway for transport of goods.⁴³

The immediate factor that triggered the Iran-Iraq war was Ayatollah Khomeini's seizure of power in Iran in 1979. The new rule in Iran was fundamentally different from the Baath party rule in Iraq, and the new leader of Iran sought to spread the Islamic revolution to other countries. Saddam Hussein, who was Sunni, knew that Iraq with its large Shia population was a target.⁴⁴ Iraq had since the foundation of the national state sought to be a leading power in the Middle East, and Saddam understood that the time was ideal for him to hit when Iran was split and unstable after the revolution. In

⁴¹ *Folk og forsvars sikkerhetspolitiske leksikon*, 4th edition, s.v. "Iran" and "Iraq".

⁴² Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 18.

⁴³ Eknes, *From Scandal to Success*, 6.

⁴⁴ Ingebrigtsen, *Konflikten mellom Iran og Irak*, 76-90.

addition, Iran had distanced itself from its former powerful friend USA and other former allies, so Saddam knew that Iran was basically alone.⁴⁵

The Algiers agreement had settled the major disputes for a time, but both Iran and Iraq blamed the counterpart for violating their borders and territories in the year leading up to the outbreak of war.⁴⁶ Saddam Hussein declared the Algiers Agreement void 17 September 1980. The conflict escalated the following days, and the full war broke out five days later when Iraq invaded Iranian territory.⁴⁷

Iraq advanced into Iranian territory the following months, but it became clear that Iran would not give up. Saddam had thought the Iranian regime to be unstable and weak, and imagined a war would be an easy win for Iraq. He was mistaken. An attacking state proved to be what Iran needed: An enemy, which the country could unite against. It also needed a strong leader and Khomeini thus managed to consolidate his power. After the initial Iraqi offensive and by the end of the year, the war settled into a stalemate.⁴⁸

Iran's forces were disorganised and on the defensive in the first period of the war, but they got over the initial chaos, and reorganized parts of the military system in addition to rally among the population so the armed forces increased.⁴⁹ Iran began its counterattack in May 1981, and had recaptured almost all of its areas by June 1982 when the final Iraqi troops withdrew from Iranian territory.⁵⁰

Ayatollah Khomeini had no intentions to stop at the border. He saw the Iranian advantage in the war as an opportunity to get rid of the Baath party and continued the Iranian offensive. Iraq, once the tide had turned, was willing to negotiate a peace brokered by the UN Security Council, but Ayatollah Khomeini refused to accept the resolutions UN proposed unless Saddam resigned.⁵¹ The Iraqi leader ruled that option out, so the war continued and escalated the following years.

⁴⁵ Eknes, *From Scandal to Success*, 3.

⁴⁶ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 204.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴⁸ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 225.

⁴⁹ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 176.

⁵⁰ Ingebrigtsen, *Konflikten mellom Iran og Irak*, 107.

⁵¹ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 227.



Map 2: The Gulf region. Source: Google Map.

3. The First Attacks with Chemical Weapons

Autumn 1983: The First Reports of Use of Gas

Rumours of the use of poison gas had circulated since the very beginning of the war, but the rumours had never gained any attention in international media or in international politics. Iraq might have used tear gas when they withdrew from Iranian territory in 1982, but there are no reports or data confirming this.⁵²

The Land war in 1983

The first reliable reports of use of illegal gases came in 1983. At that time, fighting took place at central parts of the border between the two countries, and neither Iran nor Iraq managed to conquer significant areas of land, and Saddam Hussein's "quick war" had turned into a long and bloody conflict.⁵³ It was clear at this point that the Iranian forces were much better organized than they had been in the initial stages of the war, and most of the land Iraq had conquered in the first offensives was retaken by Iran. Iraq initiated a war in the Gulf in 1983 as well, where Iraqi air fighters attacked Iranian oil tankers and oil installations. France had sold Super-Etendard fighter planes with Exocet missiles to Iraq in the summer of 1983, which made Iraq's air force superior over Iran's.⁵⁴ The aim was to divert some of Iran's attention from the border war, to lead off resources and to injure Iran's economy.⁵⁵ Still, it did not hinder the land war from continuing and escalating in 1983.

The land war had been a war of attrition since 1982, but the standstill changed in 1983. Iran launched an offensive, Wal Fajr, in February, which was directed at the road between Basrah and Baghdad, one of the largest cities in Iraq and the capital.⁵⁶ Even though Wal Fajr was a massive attack, a much more modern and well-equipped Iraqi army stopped them and the Iranian gains were limited, much because of Saddam's air force.⁵⁷ Two months later the Iranians attacked again as a part of the initial offensive,

⁵² Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 33.

⁵³ Ingebrigtsen, *Konflikten mellom Iran og Irak*, 109.

⁵⁴ Eknes, *From Scandal to Success*, 18.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁷ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Iran-Iraq war*, 161.

but yet again Saddam's air force saved Iraq as it had done in the first Wal Fajr attack. Khomeini and his advisers in Iran understood that they had to change their tactics if they wanted to succeed. Instead of launching one, big attack, Iran planned to stretch the front along the border and attack several places at the same time. Iran also wanted to open a new front at Iraq's weakest point; in the north of Iraq where the population was mainly Kurdish and hostile to the regime in Baghdad.⁵⁸ A third offensive, Wal Fajr II, was therefore launched in July 1983. Iranian forces together with Kurdish groups advanced quickly into Iraqi territory in the north and managed to break off the route between Iraq and the Kurdish areas in Iran, where Saddam had encouraged and helped the population rebel against the regime in Tehran. Iraqi forces eventually stopped the Iranian advances, but the area became a headache to Saddam Hussein as Iraqi Kurdish groups and Iran teamed up.⁵⁹ It was obvious that Iran had gained the initiative in the war. Wal Fajr III took place from Mehran on the central front from 30 July until 10 August. The Iranians managed to take some Iraqi territory, but the costs were high. Estimated deaths in the region were 12,000.⁶⁰ Iraq counter attacked with helicopters and aircraft, and the first reliable reports of use of poisonous gas started to emerge in international media.

Iraq's chemical weapons programme had been developed since the 1960s, and Saddam Hussein was both bold and crazy enough to consider using it, despite Iraq being a signatory to the Geneva Protocol. Iraq was under heavy pressure, and Saddam Hussein and his advisors had to halt the Iranian progress at any cost if they wanted to save Iraq and remain in power. An easy option was to incorporate gas in their warfare. Unofficial reports from July 1982 claim that Iraq had used tear gas to stop Iran from using human waves attacks. Human waves were an attack strategy where waves of thousands of unprotected Basij volunteers, the Iranian paramilitary militia, attacked and tried to run down Iraqi defence lines. Iranian forces thought the gas was a poisonous gas, so they fled the area. Tear gas is not lethal, and it has only temporary effect on the victims, but it had showed Iraqi officers how chemical weapons could be used.⁶¹ Considering the situation in the war Iraq came to the conclusion that the advantages of chemical weapons were worth giving it a try, despite the negative implications it might have.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 81.

⁵⁹ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 96-97.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 82.

⁶¹ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 27.

International response was probably one of the heaviest arguments for not using chemical weapons, as Iraq was dependent on support from other states.

Iran continued their strategy of stretching the front line, and attacked again in October 1983. The Wal Fajr IV offensive was successful from an Iranian point of view, and Iraq was pushed further back into Iraqi territory. Iraq eventually managed to stop the Iranian offensive, but new rumours appeared, claiming scud missiles and bombs with mustard gas were fired against civilian targets in Iran.⁶²

November 1983: The use of chemical weapons becomes a UN issue

The rumours of chemical weapons were for the first time reported to the Secretary General in the beginning of November 1983. In letters sent to the Secretary-General, Iran accused Iraq for using gas in the warfare. The use had taken place on several occasions in various sectors of the front the past weeks, and the Iranian UN representative submitted a report subsequently with detailed information about the attacks. Iran requested that the Secretary-General should send a fact-finding mission to investigate and examine the medical and military evidence of chemical weapons, so facts could be established.⁶³ Three letters concerning the same matter followed the two next weeks, and reported of an alarming escalation of the use of chemical weapons. Iran later informed the Secretary-General that samples of sand and chemical artillery had been received from the Piranshahr area, which was attacked on 25 October, and that these samples would be available as evidence of Iraq's use of chemical weapons to a mission sent by the Secretary-General. Iran also submitted a detailed report of the attack that affected Iranian troops with burning in the throat, difficulties breathing, coughing, wetness of eyes and nose, nausea and senselessness. The Iranian representative to the UN, Said Rajaie-Khorassani, also attached pictures of the victims, and informed that several other attacks had been carried out as well, mostly in the Khorramshahr area in southern Iran.⁶⁴

Iran reported of two more attacks on civilians in the middle of November. One attack hit the town of Baneh in northwestern Iran, where 31 persons were injured, and

⁶² Cordesman and Wagner, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 175.

⁶³ Letter 3.11.1983 from representative of Iran to the Secretary General. UNSC document S/16128.

⁶⁴ Letter 9.11.1983 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16140.

four died.⁶⁵ The other attack had aimed at the village of Bademjan on 21 October, where 11 had died and many more were injured.⁶⁶ Khorrasani wrote several letters to the Secretary-General in November, where he repeated the request to the Secretary-General to send a mission to investigate and verify the use of chemical weapons, and highlighted the importance that it should happen before the traces of the use disappeared, which chemical weapons do with time.⁶⁷

The Iraqi Government rejected the accusations, and claimed that the allegations were a trick to divert the attention of the UN from the Iranian aggression against Iraq and that Iran rejected the Security Council resolutions calling for peace. Iraq also opposed that the Secretary-General should give “any response to the Iranian allegations, through the dispatch of either a representative or an expert or a team of experts [.....]” The attention should be at achieving peace, not at Iranian “procrastination tactics”, which aimed to disengage states from international obligations.⁶⁸

The Council and the Secretary-General’s First Responses

Iran had broken off all contact with the Security Council since 1980. Tehran criticized the Security Council for not condemning Iraq for the aggression, and viewed this as a favouring of Iraq. The Iranian representative thus only had contact with the Secretary General, whom Iran still thought was impartial. The Secretary-General was well aware of this, and he writes in his memoirs that he deliberately distanced himself from the Security Council, so Iran would not abandon talks altogether.⁶⁹ Still, the Secretary-General had to have certain relations to the Security Council, as only the Council could make decisions.

⁶⁵ Letter 10.11.1983 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16139.

⁶⁶ Letter 16.11.1983 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16154.

⁶⁷ *Idem*.

⁶⁸ Letter 29.11.1983 from representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16193.

⁶⁹ Pérez de Cuellar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 132.

The Secretary-General's response

Despite Iran's requests to send a mission to confirm the allegations, the Secretary-General did not answer Iran's first letters, nor did he take the request to the Security Council. Instead, he focused on establishing communication between Iraq and Iran. He worked out an eight-point plan, which should be the focus for negotiations between the two parties.⁷⁰ The Secretary-General's eight points served as a basis for discussions related to a negotiated settlement, where the main aim was a cease fire and withdrawal of all forces to agreed lines.⁷¹

The Secretary-General's first official comment to Iran's requests came in a report published in mid December. The report was submitted in pursuance of paragraph 4 of UNSC resolution 540 of 1983, which condemned breaches on humanitarian law, affirmed the right to navigate in international waters, and which had urged the Secretary General to continue his peace efforts.⁷² In the end of the report, the Secretary-General brought to attention that Iran had requested a new mission to the conflict areas to update the report from May. Iran's suggestion had been that the mission could carry out inspections in both countries, but Iraq had not been willing to cooperate on such a matter. The Secretary-General argued that it would be difficult practically to send a fact-finding mission as long as one of the parties did not agree. Iraq argued that the aspect of chemical weapons could not be seen isolated from the rest of the war.⁷³ Because of Iraq's stand to the issue, the Secretary-General argued that nothing more could be done. Instead, he and his Special Representative, Olof Palme, would continue their effort to settle the conflict.⁷⁴

The Secretary-General referred to Iran's letters, but did not mention *why* Iran wanted the report updated, and he did not put any pressure on Iraq, despite the violation of the Geneva Protocol and the General Assembly resolution, which called for the Geneva Protocol to be upheld. There can be many reasons to the hesitation from the Secretary-General to do something specific about the allegations of use of chemical weapons. Iraq had been willing to negotiate since Iran had taken over the initiative in the war. Iraq had also participated in peace talks with the Security Council. In autumn

⁷⁰ Pérez de Cuellar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 139.

⁷¹ *Idem*.

⁷² Resolution 540 (1983) of 31 October 1987.

⁷³ Report 13.12.1983 by the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16214.

⁷⁴ *Idem*.

1983, peace was the Secretary-General's primary aim. Iran, on the other side, had boycotted the Security Council since 1980, and refused to participate in negotiations with Iraq. This made it more complicated for the Secretary-General (and the Council) to criticise Iraq or investigate the allegations against Iraq, since Baghdad cooperated. The Secretary-General might have feared that if he complied with Iran's wishes, he would lose the Iraqi willingness to end the war. Any hopes of a peace agreement might have been overshadowed if the use of chemical weapons was looked into.

The Secretary-General did not take the issue to the Security Council for a reason. The relationship between Iraq and third-party states had improved, while the relationship between Iran and third-party states crumbled. The Secretary-General had previously in 1983 not called on the Council to meet and deal with the war as a threat on international security, because he regarded it as unlikely that the Council would take effective action.⁷⁵ If the Council would take action to secure international peace, the Council would not take action in regard to the use of chemical weapons, especially not when both superpowers tilted towards Iraq.

Despite the evasive response from the Secretary General, it seemed that he still enjoyed respect from Iran, because they continued to contact him and to look to him for solutions. Iran blamed the international community instead, and was disappointed by the response to the issue. Khorrasani called it "a failure to their responsibilities."⁷⁶

Spring 1984: New allegations and the first specific action by the Secretary-General

The warfare slowed down in the autumn of 1983, because of the rainy season, and the war came to a new standstill.⁷⁷

The Kurds continued their guerrilla warfare against Iraqi troops in the north in 1984, so a considerable part of the Iraqi army had to be stationed to fight in the north.⁷⁸ This was of course an advantage for Iran, as it lessened the pressure on the central and the southern front. The Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq allowed Iran to focus on central parts of the border.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 138.

⁷⁶ Letter 15.12.1983 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16220.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 85.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁹ Cordesman & Wagner, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 178.

Khorsassani continued to send letters to the Secretary General in the first months of 1984, where they encouraged him to send missions to Iran to confirm that chemical weapons had been used. Iraq continued to oppose it. The appeals from Iran to the UN had also caught media's attention. Especially Western media started to dig into the allegations about the use of chemical weapons, which put pressure on the Security Council to respond to the breach of international law.⁸⁰

In February, three months after the first letters from Iran, the Secretary General announced that he planned to send a mission to both Iran and Iraq. He declared that it was his duty to dispatch a mission to investigate allegations from both Iran and Iraq of attacks on civilian targets. The mission would be dispatched when Iran and Iraq had agreed on its functions.⁸¹

Iraq had as mentioned opposed a fact-finding mission, because they insisted that it was more important to work on a peace solution instead. Iraq highlighted that they were subject to Iranian aggression, and that Iraq had welcomed peace talks and resolutions, contrary to Iran.⁸² However, Iraq changed its stand in a letter dated 18 February 1984 in response to the Secretary-General's initiative, and welcomed a mission. The Secretary-General did not specify investigation of chemical weapons as a purpose of the mission, nor did he refer to the resolution, which the General Assembly had adopted in 1982.⁸³ The treatment of prisoners of war and attacks on civilians with conventional weapons were areas of international law that Iran had also violated, and a focus on this as well might have contributed to make Iraq more willing to accept a mission.

The mission was not sent before March and the war continued in the meantime. Iran attacked Iraq again on 22 February, and the target was the road between Baghdad and Basrah this time as well. Several Iranian divisions went through the Hawizeh marshes, which is a difficult terrain to move troops and military equipment through. It took time, which again made it an easy target for Iraqi counterattacks. The Iranian attack was, however, well planned and backed by air support, so 100,000 Iranian troops advanced through the area. Iran was successful further south as well. Majnoon Island and the outskirts of Qurna, a city north of Shafi, and within the reach of the Basra-

⁸⁰ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 35-40.

⁸¹ Letter 10.2.1984 from the Secretary-General to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq. UNSC document S/16337. Letter 10.2.1984 from the Secretary-General to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran. UNSC document S/16338.

⁸² Letter 13.2.1984 from representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16342.

⁸³ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 142.

Baghdad highway were captured by Iran.⁸⁴ The Majnoon Island is an island in the middle of Majnoon oil field, Iraq's biggest oilfield and one of the world's richest, and was therefore important to take for the Iranians.

Iraq had not been prepared for the attack, but all available resources were mobilized to strike back just in time before Iran took Qurna. The southern part of Majnoon was also retaken, but the counterattacks had its cost: chemical weapons were once again used.⁸⁵

According to Khorassani, yellow gas, most likely mustard gas, had been released on 28 February in Khaybar and 700 claimed casualties.⁸⁶ This was the biggest attack with chemical weapons so far in the war. Khorassani claimed that Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iranian troops the previous days also, then in the area of Hawizeh marshes.⁸⁷ 400 soldiers had been killed or wounded in the attack, but because of the nature of gas it had sunk into the marshes, which made its effect last longer.⁸⁸ All together, Iran claimed that 1200 had lost their lives as a result of Iraqi use of chemical weapons, while another 5000 were injured in forms of blisters, breathing problems and eye problems.⁸⁹

Iraq managed to stop the Iranian offensive, but the marshes prevented Saddam's troops from striking back. The Iraqi military was modern with tanks, military vehicles and heavy armed troops, something that made it difficult to fight light Iranian infantry in the marshy landscape. Still, after three weeks of fighting Iraq managed to push Iranian troops back, and the important road between Basrah and Baghdad was still in Iraqi hands. But the battle had its cost. 500,000 soldiers participated, and 27,000 lost their lives.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 86.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁶ Letter 29.2.1984 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16380.

⁸⁷ Letter 9.3.1984 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16408.

⁸⁸ Letter 29.2.1984 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16380.

⁸⁹ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 87-88. Johnson, p.88, highlights that numbers of casualties, injured and killed during the Iran-Iraq war not always were correct since both parties used it as propaganda.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.



Map 4: Clip of southern Iraq. Source: Google Maps.

American responses to the new revelations

Iran sent many of the gas victims to European hospitals for treatment. Patients were sent to hospitals in Stockholm, Vienna and London, and the issue gained more attention when European doctors saw what cruel weapons they had been exposed to.

American journalists put pressure on the US Government to find out if they knew about the use, and whether they planned to do anything about it. The topic of chemical weapons became a delicate matter for the US since they had worked to improve the relations to Iraq in the last three years. But as a world power, which viewed themselves as a protector of human rights, they could not ignore it either. The US concluded that Iraq used chemical weapons in a public comment 5 March 1984. It further condemned the use and asked both countries to respect international law.⁹¹

⁹¹ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 51.

The first UN mission to investigate the use of chemical weapons

The US statement put indirectly a pressure on the UN as the superior international peacekeeping organization. As mentioned, after repeated requests from Iran to send a mission to confirm the use of chemical weapons, the Secretary-General sent a mission to Iran from 13 March to 19 March 1984. Even though it was not mentioned in the Secretary-General's letter to Iran and Iraq, the mission's main task was to find out whether chemical weapons had been used in Iran or not, and if it had been used; what kind of and to what extent.⁹²

The mission consisted of four specialists within the field of chemistry, one of them specializing in atomic, biological and chemical weapons. The specialists examined evidences on sites where chemical weapons were claimed used, weapons which were claimed to have contained chemical substances, and patients who were claimed to have injuries that resulted from chemical weapons. In addition were samples from sites and weapons sent to laboratories in Europe to be examined there. The report reached a clear conclusion: Chemical weapons had been used, more specifically tabun and mustard gas, in the forms of aerial bombs.⁹³

The Secretary-General showed that he took the allegations seriously when he sent a mission to Iran to investigate the Iranian allegations of use of chemical weapons. Iran was also satisfied with his effort.

The Secretary General's response to the mission's report

The Secretary-General commented the findings of chemical weapons in a public note. He wrote: "the Secretary General [...] cannot but deplore that their unanimous conclusions substantiate the allegations that chemical weapons have been used." He also highlighted the importance of observing that international law was being complied with, and referred to a statement two days before the report was published where he had

⁹² Report of the specialists appointed by the Secretary-General to investigate allegations by Iran concerning the use of chemical weapons: Note by the Secretary-General. (Published 26.3.1984) UNSC document S/16433.

⁹³ Idem.

condemned the use of chemical weapons “wherever and whenever this may occur.”⁹⁴ The Secretary General ended his note by writing that he believes that the only way to stop the violation of humanitarian law is by ending the war.⁹⁵

The Secretary-General did not condemn Iraq for the use of chemical weapons, even though the report stated that it was only Iranians who had been affected by chemical weapons. He deplored that chemical weapons had been used, and declared that such weapons should not be used anywhere at any time. In other words, Iraq was not made responsible for their actions.

In the aftermath of the mission and as a response to the escalation of the warfare and the political deadlock in the Security Council, the Secretary-General and Olof Palme decided to continue to act individually from the Council.⁹⁶

The Security Council’s response to the report

When the report showed that chemical weapons had been used it challenged the Security Council in new ways: their response towards the issue could be essential in the already strained relationship with Iran, but their response could also affect the relations with Iraq. In addition, the response would send signals to the rest of the world as well.

The Security Council met to discuss the findings of the mission in the end of March.

The representatives of the permanent member states, in addition to Egypt, India, Malta, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Peru, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Upper Volta (later Burkina Faso) and Zimbabwe were present at the meeting. The president made a statement on behalf of the Council and its members, where they condemned the use of chemical weapons and referred to the Geneva Protocol of 1925. Further on he condemned all violations of humanitarian law, and urged both parties to oblige. Finally he recalled previous resolutions, and called for a cessation of hostilities.⁹⁷

Despite the report that said chemical weapons had been used, the Security Council did not take action. The Council condemned the use of chemical weapons, but Iraq is not addressed directly in this declaration either, and what is interesting is that

⁹⁴ Report of the specialists appointed by the Secretary-General to investigate allegations by Iran concerning the use of chemical weapons: Note by the Secretary-General. (Published 26.3.1984) UNSC document S/16433.

⁹⁵ Idem.

⁹⁶ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 142.

⁹⁷ UNSC 2514th meeting 30.3.1984. UNSC document S/PV.2524.

both parties are addressed when it comes to breaking humanitarian law. The rights of prisoners of war were a big issue during the war, and both Iran and Iraq were criticized for the treatment of them, as well as the fact that both countries attacked civilian areas. When half of the statement concerned another aspect of the war than what the report was about, it lost some of its importance, and it becomes clear that the Security Council did not pay much attention to the use of chemical weapons.

This was the only meeting in 1984 which discussed the use of chemical weapons, despite Iran's reporting of several more instances even after the report on Iraq's use of them. The Council adopted one resolution in 1984, which concerned attacks on merchant vessels in the Gulf.⁹⁸ It shows that the flow of oil was much more important to the Council than the issue of chemical weapons. The report did not address Iraq, and no specific actions were taken by the Council to stop the use of chemical weapons. 20 instances of gas attacks were reported by Iran after the publication of the report. Iraq denied that they had anything to do with it. In the response to the report, Iraq criticized the Council for focusing on minor aspects of the conflict.⁹⁹

Iran complained to the Secretary-General that nothing was done, and pointed out that even though countries condemned the use of chemical weapons no one did anything to prevent it.¹⁰⁰ Companies in Germany, Italy and Great Britain sold components that could be used for the production of chemical weapons. According to Hilterman, the American export restrictions did not prove efficient either, and Iraq had probably reached a point where they were more or less self-supplied with equipment, material and substances to produce chemical weapons themselves.¹⁰¹

Iran and Iraq's Relations With the UN and Third-Party States

Some notes should be made on the relations between Iran and Iraq and the Security Council and third party states in the first years of the Iran-Iraq war. This can explain why the Secretary General and the Security Council responded to the first chemical weapons allegations with hesitation and an evasive condemnation.

⁹⁸ Resolution 552 (1984) of 1.6.1984.

⁹⁹ Letter 27.3.1984 from representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16438.

¹⁰⁰ Letter 21.5.1984 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16572.

¹⁰¹ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 62.

Iran, Iraq and the UN

It was expected that the Security Council would condemn Iraq for the aggression when Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980. For some reason, the Council did not, despite it being a responsibility manifested in the UN Charter. Instead, the Council urged both Iran and Iraq to settle their disputes. In practice, this meant that a ceasefire should happen even though Iraqi forces were still in Iranian territory. The Council also equalized Iran and Iraq, even though one part initiated the war and the other part defended itself.¹⁰² Because of this, Iran broke off all communications with the Council, and accused it for siding with Iraq.¹⁰³

The Secretary-General in 1980, Kurt Waldheim, appointed former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme as special representative to try to mediate in the conflict. Palme enjoyed respect in the Middle East, and worked for a comprehensive peace where Iraq would withdraw its forces. However, Iran insisted that Iraq had to withdraw its troops from Iranian territory before negotiations could begin, while Iraq insisted that a ceasefire should be implemented first. In addition, Iran refused to negotiate with Saddam Hussein.¹⁰⁴ In other words, there was a long road until peace would be achieved. Despite the efforts, Palme and Secretary-General Waldheim did not manage to make any progress. However, it was of great importance for the rest of the war that the Secretary-General sent Olof Palme to try to mediate between the two belligerents, because Iran appreciated the efforts and had good relations to both Secretary-General Waldheim and from 1982 to Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar. As long as there were no communications between the Council and Iran, the role of the Secretary-General was crucial.

Iraq, on the other hand, had a good relationship with both the Security Council and the two secretaries-generals during the whole war. To Iraq's advantage, the Security Council did not condemn Iraq for the aggression.¹⁰⁵ Iraq also enjoyed respect in the Council for its willingness to cooperate and negotiate.

¹⁰² Mostaghimi & Taromsari, "Double Standard: The Security Council and the Two Wars", 63.

¹⁰³ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 132.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Arend, "The Role of the United Nations in the Iran-Iraq War", 193.

Iran, Iraq and the two Superpowers

The relations between Iran and Iraq and the Security Council has to be seen in connection with the belligerents relations with the individual, permanent members of the Council, and especially the two Superpowers. In the Cold war, the US and the Soviet Union dominated and split the Security Council into two camps. France and the UK were close allies of the US. China, despite being a communistic state, had been in an ideological battle with the Soviet Union since early 1960s, because they disagreed over the communistic ideology. The Soviet Union and China were therefore not allies, and China played its own game according to its own interests.¹⁰⁶ China did not involve itself in the Iran-Iraq war, but was one of Iran's main suppliers of weapons.¹⁰⁷

Both the US and the Soviet Union had declared neutrality, and that they would not interfere in the beginning of the war.¹⁰⁸ However, the reality by 1983 was different than their official policies.

The diplomatic relations between Iran and the US deteriorated after the Islamic revolution, when the Shah, who was a close friend and ally of the US, was thrown, and the American embassy was taken hostage. Ayatollah Khomeini did not try to improve the relationship with the US either when he labelled the US as "the great Satan" and declared the West as an enemy of Iran.¹⁰⁹ The US had imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions on Iran, and encouraged other states to limit their trade with Iran.¹¹⁰ As a result of the cold relationship with Iran, the ties between Iraq and the US were rebuilt slowly but steadily, especially after President Reagan came to office in Washington in 1982. The US sought to get some influence in one of the countries, despite its official policy of neutrality and non-involvement.¹¹¹

Iran's relationship with the Soviet Union was also rocky during the Iran-Iraq war. The Soviet Union had had limited communications with Iran as long as Iran was a close friend of the US. When the new regime took power in 1979, Moscow saw an opportunity to improve the relations between Iran and the Soviet Union, but it did not take long before Moscow realised that a relationship with the new Islamic regime would be

¹⁰⁶ Marks, *Den moderne verdens opprinnelse*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ Rubin, "The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War", 131.

¹⁰⁸ Tarock, *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 60.

¹⁰⁹ As cited in Tarock, *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Tarock, *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 67.

¹¹¹ Idem.

challenging. Iran condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, and Khomeini declared communists as enemies of Iran. Iran was also suspicious of the relationship between Moscow and Baghdad.¹¹² The Soviet Union also voted against economic sanctions against Iran for holding hostages at the American Embassy in Tehran in the Security Council in February 1980. The sanctions were passed in the Council, but the Soviet Union helped Iran economically by being a transit country for equipment and goods.¹¹³ The outbreak of the war in 1980 made the Soviet double game even more difficult, as it would not be easy for the Soviet Union to maintain relations to both belligerents. When the war broke out, the Soviet Union limited its direct arms export to Iraq, and started facilitating arms to Iran.¹¹⁴ The arms sales were not perceived well in Baghdad, but Iraq needed all the arms it could get, so they were forced to play along in the Soviet Union's game in the first years of the war.

Iraq's communications with the Soviet Union had also improved after a period of lukewarm relations in the 1970s. The Soviet Union had supported Iraq with arms and advisors since the Baath party came to power, but the crackdown of the Iraqi Communist Party and the Iraqi condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Soviet support of Ethiopia in the Ethio-Somali War (1977-1978) had led to troubled relations between the Soviet Union and Iraq.¹¹⁵ However, the Soviet Union wanted to preserve its relation to Iraq, and it became a major foreign policy goal in 1979.

The Soviet Union was already an ally of Iraq, and Iraq thus became one of few countries, which both superpowers tilted towards, and the tilt was evident in 1983.

Iran, Iraq and their relations with other Gulf States

Some notes should be made on Iran and Iraq's relations to other states in the region as well, since they did not cry out about the use of chemical weapons either. The new, Islamic regime in Iran did not only present a new day for the US and the Soviet Union, it also presented a new reality for other Gulf States.

On one hand, the relations between Iran and other Gulf states deteriorated. All other Gulf States except Iran are Arab, and dominated by Sunni Muslims, except Oman,

¹¹² Tarock, *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 40-41.

¹¹³ Ibid., 39.

¹¹⁴ Katz, "Moscow and the Gulf War", 141.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 139.

which follow Ibadi Islam.¹¹⁶ The new regime in Iran threatened to spread the revolution, which was a threat to the ruling regimes in the other Gulf States. According to Khomeini, monarchies and secular-nationalist governmental forms were not “Islamic”.¹¹⁷ Second, there was a general conception that the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini was a threat to both regional and internal stability.

Iraq, on the other hand, had improved its relations to other Arab Gulf States since 1975. Saddam Hussein moved more and more away from the nationalist Baath-party agenda when he came to power in 1979, and focused on Pan-Arabism instead. As the war went on, Saddam Hussein referred more and more to Pan-Arabism.¹¹⁸

When the war broke out in 1980, the Gulf States more or less supported Iraq. No one condemned Iraq for the invasion, and no one sided with Iran.¹¹⁹ As a response to the new regime in Iran and as a response to the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formed in 1981.¹²⁰ Together the six states, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, would be stronger.¹²¹ Both Iran and Iraq were excluded from the organization, but as will be seen later, the GCC was by no means neutral.

Consequences of the First Response

The responses from the Secretary General and the Security Council probably had long-lasting consequences for the war.

First of all, the Security Council’s lack of an immediate response to the use of poison gas may have encouraged Saddam Hussein to continue its use, because his actions did not get any implications in the international society.

Second, the lack of response can be seen as a signal of indifference to whether states followed international laws or not. In the worst-case scenario, it could have encouraged other states to use chemical weapons also. Chemical weapons are as

¹¹⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. “Oman.” 11.11.2014.

<http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman/257069/Plant-and-animal-life>

¹¹⁷ Ulrichsen, “The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War. Cooperation and Confusion”, 112-113.

¹¹⁸ Idem.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹²⁰ Kechichian, “The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Gulf War”, 91.

¹²¹ Ulrichsen, “The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War. Cooperation and Confusion”, 114.

mentioned weapons of mass destruction alongside biological weapons, radiological weapons and nuclear weapons. Accepting them is considered as opening the door for an acceptance of nuclear weapons.

Third, not reacting against the use of chemical weapons in the initial stages probably contributed to the course of the rest of the war. Decisive action, both in forms of punitive measures and preventive measures, might have prevented Iraq from using chemical weapons again.

Fourth and last, the lack of response to the Iraqi use of poison gas became a source of irritation for the Iranian Government. Tehran had since the outbreak of the war accused the Council for favouring Iraq, and Iran had boycotted the Council since 1980.

The lack of response to the allegations of chemical weapons did not affect the relationship between Iran and the Secretary-General, but it certainly did not improve Iran's impression of the Security Council, and Iran continued its boycott of the Council.

4. Escalation

The fighting continued around Qurna in southern Iraq in 1984. Iran tried to attack again in April, but the Iraqis made use of the Tigris. They led the water from the river to the marshes, making it hard for Iranian infantry to proceed and the fighting reduced gradually as a result of it.¹²² The situation remained like this the entire summer, and Iraq used the halt in the fighting to arm up, enrol more men and strengthen their defences.¹²³ Iran attacked on the central front in October again, but it did not result in anything.¹²⁴ The Iranian representative to the UN, Khorassani, reported of four incidents of chemical weapons against Iranian forces between August 1984 and January 1985, and three incidents between January 1985 and March 1985. Only one of the attacks led to hospitalization of 8 people, while the others caused minor health issues.¹²⁵

Attacks with chemical weapons decreased significantly in the summer and autumn of 1984. It is unknown whether it was the American condemnation, the export ban, the Secretary-General's mission, or if it was the Security Council's condemnation of it that prevented Iraq from using it. Some researchers point to the fact that Iran did not launch any large-scale attacks in this period, so there was no need to attack with poison gas. Other researchers claim that Iraq used this period to improve and refine their chemical weapons arsenal. Iraq continued to import components, which could be used in the manufacturing of chemical weapons, from Europe, especially from Western Germany.¹²⁶

It might be a combination of these factors that made Iraq slow down on its attacks, but it is quite obvious in retrospect that Iraq had not abandoned its chemical weapons programme. 1985 experienced new large-scale attacks with poison gas.

¹²² Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 88.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹²⁵ Letter 26.3.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17059.

¹²⁶ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 61-62.

1985: Increased Use of Gas

Iranian inquiries to the Secretary-General in spring 1985

Even though the UN mission confirmed the use of chemical weapons in 1984, in addition to condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, 1985 is a year where chemical weapons attacks increased in quantity. Iran pointed out this to the Secretary-General and the Security Council several times during 1985. The first letter concerning this matter was sent to the Secretary-General 5 February 1985 when Khorassani transmitted a letter from the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Akbar Velayati. In this letter he informed the Secretary-General of Iraq's continuing use of chemical weapons. Velayati was alarmed of Iraq's non-existing response to the Secretary-Generals appeal to refrain from chemical weapons, which increased the risk of new attacks. Velayati also blamed "the obstructionist policies of certain countries that prefer the preservation of their imperialist interests to the upholding of international law" that nothing had been done previously.¹²⁷ As a result, Velayati requested that legal means should be used to stop Iraq from using chemical weapons. According to Velayati, a "practical option" was the only solution; anything else would be regarded as negative from an Iranian point of view.¹²⁸ He did not elaborate on what this practical option could be, but Iran had previously asked for a permanent UN mission to be based in Tehran, which would be a preventive solution. Sanctions were another option, which would have been punitive. Velayati warned that there was other effective ways to stop Iraq without explaining this further, but wrote that this was a last option, which Iran did not want to resort to yet.¹²⁹

Iran's concerns over Iraq's lack of response to the Secretary-Generals appeal not to use chemical weapons was repeated in letters in winter 1985. Seyed Ali Khamenei, president of Iran, sent one letter 18 March 1985.¹³⁰ He warned the Secretary-General that the use of chemical weapons was not just a violation of international law, but also a trampling of international law in general, which could lead to a weakening of

¹²⁷ Letter from Ali Akbar Velayati 5.2.1985 in letter from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/16941.

¹²⁸ *Idem.*

¹²⁹ *Idem.*

¹³⁰ Letter from President Khamenei in letter 18.3.1985 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17039.

international rules, treaties and laws. Khamenei, like Velayati, also requested a specific measure to avoid future chemical weapons attacks, and suggested that a UN-sent mission stationed in Tehran would prevent Iraq from using chemical weapons. He questioned why such an easy measure could not be conducted, and repeated the threat of harder means if the use of chemical weapons continued.¹³¹ By warning of the weakening of the legality of international norms and laws, he made the issue relevant to all countries. Years of cooperation and respect of international law were now endangered.

Land operations in spring 1985

The fighting slowed down in the winter, and both Iran and Iraq had used the wet season in the end of 1984 to build up their armies.

Iraq knew that Iran would attack again as soon as the wet season was over, so the Iraqi defence lines were strengthened and artillery was added to the already superior firepower.¹³² The Iranians had also learned from their faults and organized their forces better, trained them better, planned new attack methods and acquired more equipment.¹³³ Despite Iraq's strengthening of the defence, it did not hold when Iran launched Operation Badr around the Hawizeh marshes in March 1985. The Iranians had attacked Iraqi positions with small patrol boats in the winter months of 1984/85, so Iraqi defence positions were already pressed.

The Iranians pushed 6 kilometres further into Iraqi territory in Operation Badr, and finally managed to break across the highway between Basra and Baghdad.¹³⁴ However, the Iranian success did not last for long. Iraq stroke back almost immediately, using massed artillery and air strikes. After nine days Iran was back at where they had started, but with 8000-12,000 soldiers less than when the battle started.¹³⁵

Chemical weapons had only been used sporadically and in small scale since spring 1984, but new, massive attacks in 1985 changed this. The Iranian representative to the UN reported of the chemical attacks in a letter to the Secretary-General 14 March

¹³¹ Letter from President Khamenei in letter 18.3.1985 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17039.

¹³² Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p. 199.

¹³³ Ibid., p.198.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p.110-111.

¹³⁵ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern war*, p.203.

1985. Iraq had used chemical weapons in the southern war front around the Hawizeh marshes against Iranian soldiers on two occasions. The Iranian representative claimed that 180 Iranian soldiers had been injured from the attack, but the numbers would have been higher was it not for the weather conditions, which had worked against the effects of the gas.¹³⁶ A second letter was sent a week later with a detailed report. A new attack had taken place in the morning 16 March when six capsules were dropped from Iraqi planes. According to the Iranian representative, a greyish-white smoke had ascended into the air. Iranian experts believed it to be cyanide, phosphorous and mustard gas. Four other attacks had taken place since 16 March, and 200 soldiers had been hospitalized with eye and skin irritation, breathing problems and general weakness.¹³⁷ Altogether, Iraq used chemical weapons delivered by aerial bombardment and shells on 28 occasions between 13 and 20 March. Mainly nerve gas and vesicant agents were used, according to the Iranian UN representative.¹³⁸

The use of gas increased in 1985. It has to be seen in connection with the Iranian offensives. Iraq was pressured, and used all means to strike back. The responses from the Security Council in 1983 and 1984 had been tolerable for Iraq, and the use could thus continue without it getting any implications.

The Council and the Secretary-General's Responses to the Acceleration

A new approach by the Secretary General

The escalation of warfare made the Secretary-General realize that a comprehensive peace was impossible to achieve at that point. He therefore presented seven points in spring 1985, which should be the focus of mediation, and which he hoped should lead to a de-escalation of the war:¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Letter 14.3.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General . UNSC document S/17031.

¹³⁷ Letter 21.3.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17046.

¹³⁸ Letter 11.4.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17096.

¹³⁹ The Secretary-General's plan was referred to as "the eight-point proposal", but it consisted only of seven substantive points. Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 144.

- *Cease all attacks on civilian population centres, thus reinstating the moratorium of 12 June 1984.*
- *Cease all interference with civil aviation in the airspace of the other side.*
- ***Observe the provisions of the Geneva Protocol of 1925.*** [Print in boldface marked by thesis author]
- *Cease all attacks against unarmed merchant vessels of any flag or ownership.*
- *Refrain from attacking designated ports, terminals and related facilities.*
- *Cooperate with the ICRC in arranging an exchange of POWs.*
- *Maintain continuing contact with the Secretary-General on the observance of these arrangements and on further steps toward normalization of the situation.*¹⁴⁰

As can be seen, the issue of chemical weapons was one of the seven points. The Secretary-General had finally understood that “minor aspects of the war” had to be given attention if there should be any hope of Iranian participation in negotiations.

Both Iran and Iraq rejected the points at first, so the Secretary-General went to Tehran and Baghdad to talk to the leaders of both countries. The Secretary-General had also visited Baghdad and Tehran in the beginning of April 1985. He had met with Saddam Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tariq Azziz, and Deputy Foreign Minister Ismat Kittani in Baghdad, and President Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Prime Minister Mousavi, Foreign Minister Velayati and Deputy Foreign Minister Kazempour-Ardebili. All aspects of the war had been discussed, and both countries welcomed peace, but Iran had said that the failure of the Security-Council to condemn Iraq for its aggression in addition to other breaches of international law were serious obstacles. The aspect of chemical weapons was of particular importance to Iran.¹⁴¹ The Secretary-General would convey this information to the Security Council.

Iran then accepted the eight points unconditionally, but Iraq did not.¹⁴²

In his memoirs, Secretary-General de Cuéllar expresses how difficult it was to do anything about the situation, because he lacked support from the permanent members of the Security Council. He sensed that the permanent members did not mind a continuation of the conflict.¹⁴³ The Soviet Union already sold war equipment, directly

¹⁴⁰ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 144.

¹⁴¹ Report 12.4.1985 of the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/19097.

¹⁴² Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 146-148.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 149.

and indirectly, to both belligerents. As mentioned earlier, France had sold bomber planes to Iraq, but started to sell advanced weapons systems to Iran as well.¹⁴⁴ Later, it would be known that the US also sold weapons to Iran. Three of the permanent members of the Security Council thus benefitted economically of the war. This shows how problematic the war was. Three of the permanent members of the Security Council made money on the war, which might have led them to positions where they were not interested in ending the war.

The Secretary-General published a report concerning the last months' work regarding the situation between Iran and Iraq 12 April 1985. In addition to his travel to the Middle East, he had had meetings with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran and with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq in the mid of March 1985 in New York. The new report of renewed use chemical weapons had come at the same time.

The Secretary-General informed that he had presented proposals to both Iran and Iraq, which aimed to reduce the warfare and to pursue peace. In addition to specifically address the attacks on civilian areas and on unarmed ships, he addressed the topic of chemical weapons, which was of particular concern. Examination of victims in London and Vienna had showed that chemical weapons were still used, and he reminded the belligerents of the laws they were subject to through the Geneva Protocol.¹⁴⁵ He repeated his previous condemnation of chemical weapons "wherever and whenever" it occurred.¹⁴⁶

A reduction of hostilities was a part of the Secretary-General's plan towards negotiations between the two parties and eventually peace, and he continued to work on the basis of the "points for discussion in relation to negotiated settlement", which the Secretary-General had suggested in the meetings in New York in 1983. He also urged the Security Council to invite both Iran and Iraq to take part in the future examinations of the war.¹⁴⁷

The Secretary-General did not address Iraq in the condemnation of chemical weapons this time either, but repeated his rather general comment saying that chemical weapons should not be used anywhere or at any point. The Secretary General tried to be

¹⁴⁴ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 149.

¹⁴⁵ Report 12.4.1985 of the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17097.

¹⁴⁶ *Idem*.

¹⁴⁷ *Idem*.

as objective and on good terms with both belligerents. He was the only person, who had good relations to both Iran and Iraq, and he did not risk alienating Iraq by being general in his condemnation. Besides, he did not have the power to punish Iraq for using chemical weapons. The failure to address Iraq was an issue that provoked the Iranian leadership, but Iran never accused the Secretary-General for being partial or not condemning Iraq. Iran blamed the Security Council.

Did the Security Council favour Iraq?

The Iranian representative to the beginning of the war accused the Security Council for favouring of Iraq. Iran had since the beginning of the war viewed the actions and opinions of the Security Council to be partial and siding with Iraq, even though Iran, as they saw it, was the victim of Iraqi aggression. The claimed tilt of the Security Council towards Iraq was a serious obstacle to Iran when it came to negotiations, and the Iranians demanded that the Council had to be neutral if peace should be achieved. This was also mentioned specifically in the Secretary-General's report. The Secretary-General did not comment on these accusations in his report, but promised to inform the Security Council as well as Iraq on Iran's stand.¹⁴⁸

In his statement the Secretary-General reminded the Council that his foremost duty was to end the war, but as the conflict went on he was obliged to reduce the war's negative effects in areas such as attacks on civilian targets, prisoners of war, safety for navigation, civil aviation, and chemical weapons. Iran repeated its demand for accepting a ceasefire: Iraq had to be condemned as the aggressor, and Iraq would have to pay for reparations. These were unrealistic demands for Iraq.

Today it is clear that it was Iraq who ignited the war when they invaded Iran in 1980, but the opinion was different in the 1980s. Some viewed the escalation of the conflict in advance of the breakout as Iran's fault, and a condemnation of Iraq as the war aggressor seemed unfair to many. It is hard to say 30 years later whether they really believed that Iran was the one who provoked an Iraqi attack, or whether they claimed that Iran was the one to blame, because they sided with Iraq.

In 1985 it was quite obvious that Iraq struggled in the land war, while Iran pushed on. In addition, the Iranian regime was looked upon as unpredictable, hostile

¹⁴⁸ Report 12.4.1985 of the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17097.

and a possible military danger to the neighbouring states, and also a danger to the region and the world in general when it came to values, ideologies and religion. These factors may have contributed to the hesitation from the Security Council and the Secretary General to condemn Iraq as the aggressor and to blame Iraq when it came to the use of chemical weapons. Iraq was willing to participate in peace talks and to end the war, contrary to Iran. Even though the Secretary-General's statement on the use of chemical weapons was vague, he still addressed the topic specifically and highlighted the importance of it. He also underlined that he was committed to work specifically with it. The two parties were far away from each other at that point, so the Secretary-General was more or less forced to try a new approach. He declared that he would try to gather the two belligerents to take part in talks to discuss and re-examine all aspects of the conflict. The report did not bring new issues to the table, nor did it solve any issues, and the conflict was as locked as before. A comprehensive peace was not possible to achieve at the present point, so a step-by-step approach was much more likely to succeed, or at least limit the warfare.

Chemical weapons victims in European hospitals

Chemical weapons had been confirmed used in the UN-mission sent to Iran in 1984, but the Secretary-General continued to look into whether chemical weapons had been used or not. After the repeated letters from the Iranian representative to the UN with allegations of renewed use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi army in March, the Secretary-General sent a medical specialist mission to hospitals in Europe where victims of the attacks were hospitalized. The purpose of this was "to obtain an authoritative and independent opinion on the information coming from the hospital centres concerned."¹⁴⁹ The specialist whom the Secretary-General sent was Dr. Manuel Domínguez, who was dispatched to Iran the previous year. He visited hospitals in Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom 1-5 April 1985.

The report was submitted to the Secretary-General 8 April. Dr. Domínguez had examined altogether 17 patients, and they all had the same symptoms of eye injuries, blackening of the skin in various degrees, detachment of skin and lung injuries. All these

¹⁴⁹ Letter 17.4.1985 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council. UNSC document S/17127 and add.1

symptoms were the same as the ones observed by the mission in Iran in 1984, and Dr. Domínguez concluded in his report with that chemical weapons, more specifically Yperite, a type of mustard gas, perhaps in combination with hydrocyanic gas, were used in March 1985. The attacks were in forms of air dropped bombs.¹⁵⁰

The Secretary-General continued to look into the issue, but, as Khorassani pointed out in several of his letters sent during the spring of 1985, no specific actions were taken to stop the use of chemical weapons. General condemnations and UN missions did obviously not prevent Iraq from conducting new attacks with chemical weapons: Khorassani reported of new poison gas attacks in April. Iraq had used mustard and nerve gases against Iranian forces on several occasions 8 and 9 April, and 200 people were injured, while 15 died.¹⁵¹

The Security Council's response to the increased use of chemical weapons

The 2576th meeting in the Security Council was held behind closed doors 25 April 1985 in New York, and a statement was published after the meeting. The president of the Security Council, Javier Arias Stella, declared that the Council was appalled that chemical weapons had been proved used against Iranian soldiers in March and condemned the renewed use of it. The Council referred to the previous statement on the issue, which was conveyed 30 March 1984, and recalled that both Iran and Iraq were subjects to the Geneva Protocol of 1925. The President and the council also condemned the violations of humanitarian law and encouraged negotiations to restore peace. They also expressed their support to an examination of all aspects of the war where both Iran and Iraq could participate as a step to end the conflict.¹⁵²

It is important to state that additional information had been added in this statement in comparison to the one from March 1984. In this statement the Council did not only condemn the use of chemical weapons as it did in the one from 1984, but they condemned the use of chemical weapons against *Iranian soldiers*. The statement did not condemn Iraq, but it was a step forward that the victims were identified. Iran still

¹⁵⁰ Letter 17.4.1985 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council. UNSC document S/17127 and add. 1.

¹⁵¹ Letter 9.4.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17088.

Letter 11.4.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17095.

¹⁵² UNSC 2576th meeting 25.4.1985. UNSC document S/PV.2576.

thought it too vague, and it was certainly not enough to hinder Iraq from using chemical weapons again.

The issue of chemical weapons also concerned other organizations. The European Community's 10 member states also condemned the use of chemical weapons in a declaration sent to the Secretary-General dated 6 May 1985.¹⁵³ This was the first statement in which the European Community condemned the use of chemical weapons, and it shows an increasing interest in the war from the international society. It should be noted though, that the European Community did not do anything either to prevent the use of chemical weapons.

Iran reported of new poison gas attacks in May 1985. Khorassani claimed that artillery shells had delivered mustard gas on 7 and 8 May, and he urged the Secretary-General to send a team from the UN to examine the sites in Fakkeh, on the border in the south, and Sardasht, in the north of Iran.¹⁵⁴ Khorassani sent a new letter in the middle of July where he claimed that chemical canon-balls had been shelled on the northeast of the Iraqi city Basrah, where Iranian soldiers were positioned.¹⁵⁵

The War of the Cities

Back in June 1984, Iran and Iraq had signed an UN-initiated agreement, where they agreed not to attack civilian targets. However, the agreement did not last for long.

Iraq bombed a factory in Ahvaz 5 March 1985, the capital of the Iranian province Khuzestan in Western Iran, and an unfinished nuclear power plant in Bushahr, a city on the Iranian coast. Tehran argued that Baghdad had violated the agreement by doing this, and Iran retaliated by bombing Basrah. As a counter response, Iraq bombed a number of Iranian cities and towns, including Isfahan, Iran's third largest city. Iraq used its modern air force to bomb cities, and were quite successful from an Iraqi point of view. Iran on the other hand did not have the same strength in the air and used missiles to attack cities instead. The Soviet missiles that Iran used were not accurate, so even though Iran aimed at central parts of Baghdad and Kirkuk in the next round of bombings, they did not strike important targets, but mainly abandoned areas of the suburbs to the cities.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Letter 7.5.1985 from representative of Italy to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17161.

¹⁵⁴ Letter 13.5.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17181.

¹⁵⁵ Letter 16.7.1985 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17342.

¹⁵⁶ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 134-135.

The two parties agreed on a temporary ceasefire 6 April, but what is known as *the War of the Cities* resumed again after a car bomb exploded in Kuwait 25 May. The bomb was aimed at the Kuwaiti leader, Shaikh Sabah al Sabah, and Iraq claimed that the suicide bomber behind it had close links to the Iranian regime, so Iraq carried out new air raids on Tehran. The bomb also made Kuwait tilt more towards Iraq. Kuwait had previously been officially neutral in the war.¹⁵⁷

In the spring of 1985 Iraq bombed Tehran 43 times, while Iran bombed Baghdad 12 times.¹⁵⁸ That shows how effective and strong the Iraqi air force was, but despite Saddam's hope that it would turn the population against Khomeini, it did the opposite: The population of Iran looked upon Saddam Hussein and Iraq as violators of humanity, and compared him to the shah: Khomeini was the leader in the battle against oppression.¹⁵⁹

The war in summer and autumn 1985

The land war slowed down in the summer of 1985, and there are no reports of more attacks of chemical weapons until 1986 when Iran launched new offensives. The war escalated in other areas, though, and that can be one of the explanations of why the Security Council or the Secretary-General ignored the use of chemical weapons: It had become a minor issue in comparison to other issues in the war, especially the tanker war.

The summer and autumn of 1985 did not involve any large offensives from either part, but fighting took place on the southern and the central front. Iran managed to take some land during the summer of 1985, but not of any significant value.¹⁶⁰ It was clear that Iran continued to dominate the marshlands in the south, especially the area around the Hawizeh marshes. Iraq on their side remained defensive.

¹⁵⁷ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 98.

¹⁵⁸ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 136.

¹⁵⁹ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 56.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

Third-Party States Attention: The Tanker War

When the fighting more or less settled into a new stalemate after Operation Badr, the Tanker war in the Gulf escalated. This issue got much more attention from third-party states than the use of chemical weapons.

According to Iraq, Saddam's forces hit 30 oil tankers on their way to and from Iranian oil stations, while Iran hit seven ships carrying Iraqi oil in the first three months of 1985. The Iraqi tactics to injure Iranian oil export were successful in the beginning. Some ships refused to sail too far up the Gulf to buy and tank Iranian oil, so Iran started to ship oil themselves: Iranian tankers sailed from Kharg Island, which is an offshore oil terminal situated 225 km south of the Iraqi coastline, to Sirri Island, an oil terminal further south in the Gulf. Sirri island was harder to reach for Iraqi aircrafts and missiles, and therefore safer for oil tankers.¹⁶¹ The Iranian strategy worked, and Iraq had to look in other directions to hurt the Iranian oil export. Much thanks to U.S. navigation systems and French planes and assistance with tactics, Iraq started to attack Kharg Island itself systematically in the mid of August. The island was Iran's largest crude oil terminal at sea, and almost 90 per cent of Iran's oil had to be exported from the island during the war. Four major scale attacks were carried out in August and early September and hit central parts of the oil installation, while more attacks followed in October and November. Still, statistics show that Iran's oil production was not as severely hurt over time as Iraq hoped for. On the contrary, the production rose in 1985 compared to 1984, which can be explained by the many loading points Kharg Island had. Even though one loading point was damaged it was relatively easy to repair, and in the meantime Iran could use other points.

As a response to the attacks on Kharg Island, Khomeini once again threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz. The threats were never put to life, but Iran physically controlled more and more vessels sailing in the Gulf, to see if they carried war equipment to Iraq.¹⁶² Iran did not have the capacity to strike back in a similar scale, and mainly controlled and harassed ships in the Gulf.

¹⁶¹ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p. 209.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 213.



Map 5: Clip of the Persian Gulf. Source: Google Maps.

Iran had also suffered heavy losses in 1984 and 1985, but Ayatollah Khomeini and his advisors in Tehran still believed in Iranian victory despite the losses and despite an increasingly offensive Iraq. They used the autumn of 1985 to build up their army further. In addition to strategic planning and recruitment of new soldiers, Iran bought chemical weapons defence systems. There are also indications from late 1985 that showed signs of Syrian help to Iran to develop its own chemical weapons.¹⁶³

Iran continued to control ships in the Gulf, which provoked third party states, but it was events in the Gulf States that contributed to a further hostility towards Iran. Several car bombings took place in Kuwait in December. Several of them were directed at the American Embassy, but also other targets in Kuwait. The group behind it was supported by the Iranian regime, which led to a deepened hostility between Iran and Kuwait and the US. It is believed the terrorists thought the bombings would pressure Kuwait to stop the aid to Iraq.¹⁶⁴ It did not. On the contrary, it led to increased support for Iraq, and a further hostility towards Iran. Incidents like these made Gulf States more convinced that the new regime in Iran was unreliable, and a victory of the war to Iran would be fatal for the entire region. Mistaken Iranian politics like the idea behind the

¹⁶³ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p.218.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

events in Kuwait can thus be seen as one of the reasons why other Gulf States closed their eyes to the Iraqi use of chemical weapons.

Spring 1986: The battles of Faw

The Iranian seizure of the northern island of the Majnoon Islands had been a hard blow for Iraq, and it was important for them to retake the islands, which had been under Iranian control since February 1984. The islands were important to retake, because of their economic value as well as strategic value. Iraq attacked Iranian positions 6-8 January 1986, and re-captured the southern part of the island. The northern part, however, remained in Iranian hands, and Iraq did not make any attempts to retake it either.¹⁶⁵ However, Iran still had the initiative in the land war, despite the setback at the Majnoon Islands.

The next Iranian offensive started 9 February, and was named Wal Fajr 8. The goal was to take Faw, a peninsula on the west bank of the Shatt al-Arab, in southeastern Iraq. By taking Faw, Iran could block Iraq's access to the Gulf, and disrupt Iraqi oil production. Once the peninsula was taken Iran hoped to be able to reach Basra, and to disrupt Iraq's communication lines to Kuwait. In addition, southern Iraq had a substantial population of Shia Muslims, and Khomeini sought to liberate them from "the criminal rule of Saddam Hussein and the Baath party", and of course to gain support from them.¹⁶⁶ Iraq was unprepared for an attack on Faw, and the peninsula was taken by Iran after a week. The Iranian seizure of one of the most important areas in Iraq was a shock to Saddam Hussein and his staff in Baghdad, and he had to strike back as soon as possible. However, they were not able to counterattack until the end of the month due to bad organising and difficult weather. This gave Iran time to dig in, and to prepare to defend their newly gained positions, which made the Iraqi counterattack difficult when it came.

Iraq used firepower, armour and air force in the counterattacks, and the attacks were so comprehensive that Iraq had to purchase emergency ammunition from abroad. Iraq used all available means to retake Faw. From the 9 February to 31 March Iraq used Tabun and mustard gas fired from artillery and bombs to support the air raids. However,

¹⁶⁵ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p. 217.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.219.

the landscape on Faw also contributed to limited effects: The chemical agents were neutralised in the marshy landscape as water absorbed the effects. There were also unfavourable weather conditions in the area at the time. 700 were killed or seriously injured by chemical weapons during the fighting at Faw. Many of them were Basij troops, Khomeini's people's militia, who did not have sufficient training in using chemical weapons defence gear. 700 were not a big number compared to the overall casualties in the battle, but the use of gas paralysed the Iranian forces and prevented them from counterattacking.¹⁶⁷

Did Iran use chemical weapons as well?

In February 1986, Iraq also blamed Iran for using poison gas against Iraqi forces. The representative to the UN from Iraq, Ismat Kittani, conveyed a statement in a letter to the Secretary-General from Iraq's Minister of Culture and Information on 13 February 1986, where he claimed that Iran had used chemical weapons against Iraqi forces on 12 February and 13 February, i.e. during the Iranian attack of Faw.¹⁶⁸ No place or any other details were submitted in the letter or given in the statement, but he declared that the act would not go unpunished. The same threat was repeated in a letter from Kittani to the Secretary-General the same day, where he also claimed that the use of chemical weapons was a scheme from Iranian authorities to distract the UN from the real problem, namely the Iranian aggression on Iraqi territory and the threat to peace and stability.¹⁶⁹

Some comments have to be made on why it is unlikely that Iran used chemical weapons against Iraq. It is highly unlikely that Iran had chemical weapons, and at least not developed enough to use them in battle at this time. In addition, Khomeini personally disapproved of chemical weapons, because he regarded them as un-Islamic.¹⁷⁰

It was never proven that Iran used chemical weapons against Iraqi forces, as Iraq declined the Secretary-General's request to investigate Iraq's allegations. Iraq replied that the issue had been reported and was addressed in resolution 582 (1986), and it was

¹⁶⁷ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p.224.

¹⁶⁸ Statement made by the Minister of Culture and Information of Iraq 13.2.1986 in letter 13.2.1986 from representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17824.

¹⁶⁹ Letter 13.2.1986 from representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17826.

¹⁷⁰ Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini Works, "Imam Khomeini Strongly Opposed Developing Nukes."

therefore not necessary to pay attention to it any further. The focus should be on ending the war instead of dealing with “secondary aspects”.¹⁷¹

Iran on their side denied any use of chemical weapons, and claimed that it was the Iraqi chemical weapons that had gone wrong and affected both Iranian and Iraqi troops.¹⁷²

The Iranian claim is likely to be the correct version of what happened. It was not uncommon that attacks with chemical weapons went wrong, and Iraq had not developed proper systems to target the effects precisely. Chemical weapons are, as previously mentioned, very sensitive to weather conditions and to geography in the surrounding areas. The Iraqis might have deployed chemical weapons too close to their own troops, and a sudden change of wind direction can have blown the gas in the direction of Iraqi soldiers instead of the Iranians. The fact that Iraq did not provide any details about the attack, and that they declined the offer to have it investigated by a neutral group adds up suspicion that the allegations were false.

What is important is that the Secretary-General offered to send a mission to investigate the allegations immediately. It shows that allegations of chemical weapons were taken seriously at once, and that the Secretary-General responded at once as opposed to the first attacks in 1983. It also shows that both countries were given the same opportunity to get the allegations confirmed.

The relations between regional states and the belligerents in 1986

Iran launched Wal Fajr IV in the Kurdish area of Northern Iraq at the same time as Iraq tried to retake Faw. The Iranians did not manage to conquer any significant areas, but the offensive tied down Iraqi troops, so they could not be used in the more strategic battles in the south.¹⁷³ The Iraqi attempt to retake the Faw peninsula turned into a long, bloody and exhausting battle for both sides. Iran controlled about 200 square km, and most of the fighting had turned into a stalemate by April, and the situation would remain so until early 1988. Both Iran and Iraq somehow seemed to agree on the status on Faw, and moved their attention to the main front east of Basra instead.

¹⁷¹ Report of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to investigate the use of chemical weapons: Note by the Secretary-General 12.3.1986. UNSC document S/17911.

¹⁷² Letter 18.2.1986 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17843.

¹⁷³ Hiro, *The Longest War*, p. 168-170.

The Faw offensive in February 1986 made the neighbouring states nervous. An Iranian victory in the war had suddenly gone from possible to likely, as Iran was successful in the battlefield and pushed Saddam's forces further into Iraqi territory. Other countries in the Middle East, e.g. Kuwait, had tried to stay out of the conflict, at least officially, as both Iran and Iraq had been important trade partners to other states in the area, but the latest Iranian offensive and the tanker war made the Gulf States turn against Iran officially.

First of all, the aggressor role had changed from Iraq to Iran. Iran had since 1982 turned the tide and was in 1986 not only the offensive part in the war, but also the successful one. Other Gulf States viewed Saddam Hussein as a much more reliable neighbour than Khomeini in Iran. Saddam Hussein's rule was Sunni and shared many of the same values as other Arab leaders. The Iranian rule was not only a threat to Arab states in terms of military power, but also in terms of ideology. Since he came to power, Khomeini had declared that he wished to spread the Iranian revolution, and Arabian leaders saw this as a threat to their positions.

Second, Khomeini and other Iranian leaders threatened to expand the war to other Gulf States, because of their indirect support of Iraq. Even though most countries had declared neutrality in the war, many of them had supported Iraq with war equipment, loans or been important trade partners. The direct threat from Khomeini did not prevent the support of Iraq; on the contrary, it led to closer cooperation with Saddam Hussein and Iraq, and a further alienation of Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran.

Security Council meetings in February 1986

The Security Council met in a series of meetings in February 1986 as a result of the recent events, and representatives from Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen had requested to be a part of the discussion of the issue.¹⁷⁴ In addition, the representative from the United Arab Emirates was a member of the Security Council. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, was also allowed to take part in the discussion after request, in addition to

¹⁷⁴ The Security Council in 1986 consisted of the five permanent members and Australia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Ghana, Madagascar, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.

the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, which Iraq was a member of.¹⁷⁵ The first meeting was held 18 February at the Headquarters in New York, and the support of Iraq was expressed explicitly in the discussions by several of the actors. Iran still refused to participate in meeting with the Security Council.

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab Nations held a speech before the Security Council, and it was obvious that the use of chemical weapons was a subordinate topic to the Arab nations he represented. His major concern was that the war threatened to spread to the entire Middle East, which in turn would affect the entire global economy. Iran was the aggressor in the war, according to him, and the one to blame for creating instability in the region. Iraq, on the other hand, had responded positively to all mediation efforts and peace initiatives, while Iran had rejected them, and the League of Arab States therefore declared full solidarity with its member state Iraq. Still, the League believed in a peace process based on international law. The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States called for the big powers of the world to take “a practical stand enabling all necessary conditions to be met for an end to the conflict.”¹⁷⁶ The big powers had so far not given the conflict enough attention or done enough to prevent an escalation of the conflict. He even hinted to that some of the influential powers did not object to the continuation of the conflict. He and the Arab states expected the Security Council to implement the provisions of the United Nations Charter, especially Articles 36 and 37 of chapter VI and chapter VII, i.e. that the Security Council should take means to settle the dispute, if necessary by action.¹⁷⁷

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab Nations did not mention the use of chemical weapons. The League supported Iraq openly, and it is quite natural that they did not focus on the crimes that Iraq committed in the war, but it should be added that he mentioned several times that Iran breached international law on a regular basis. The League’s overall agenda was peace, and it stuck to the same strategy as the Security Council and the Secretary-General had had during the first year of the war, namely comprehensive peace instead of a gradual reduction of hostilities. This had previously proved impossible as Iran demanded that Iraq should pay retributions of the war, in addition to be condemned for its violation of international law, i.e. the Geneva Protocol.

¹⁷⁵ Provisional verbatim record of the 2663rd meeting of the Security Council 18.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2663.

¹⁷⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷⁷ UN, “Charter of the United Nations.”

The Deputy Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, who also spoke before the Council, criticised it for focusing too much on such subordinate aspects of the war, and that the Council had done so since 1983, i.e. the first year chemical weapons were used. He claimed that Iran had used lies and propaganda to occupy the Council with matters, instead of focusing on ending the war.¹⁷⁸ The majority of Iran's complaints to the Secretary-General regarded chemical weapons, so it is quite obvious, though not said explicitly, that Aziz had the aspect of chemical weapons in mind.

The representatives to the UN from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Tunisia and Oman held speeches on the item the following days, and they all agreed that the latest Iranian offensive was a breach on international law as they occupied another state's territory. They also highlighted that the escalation of the conflict endangered peace and stability in the entire region. They all condemned Iran for the aggression, and underlined that Iraq had welcomed previous resolutions and been willing to negotiate peace. Iran had rejected all previous resolutions and negotiating efforts.¹⁷⁹ It was clear at this point that most of the other states in the region abandoned their official stand as neutral states, and Iran's isolation became clearer.

Representatives to the UN from Egypt, Libya and Morocco had also been invited by the president of the Council to speak their views. Both the representative of Morocco and Egypt spoke in favour of a UN initiated peace, which they underlined that Iraq already had welcomed. Bahrain and a representative of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) also highlighted the importance of peace, but did not credit Iraq for its willingness to negotiate.¹⁸⁰

Libya, on the other hand, was one of the few official supporters of Iran in the conflict. Libya shared Iran's contempt for USA, and Iran was therefore an obvious ally of Libya. The representative did not address the issue of chemical weapons, even though this was one of the major preoccupations for Iran, but attacked the Council for being useless with respect to its role as a peacekeeper. According to the Libyan representative, The US paralysed the Council, in addition to acting like the world's police force, which

¹⁷⁸ Provisional verbatim record of the 2663rd meeting of the Security Council 18.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2663.

¹⁷⁹ Provisional verbatim record of the 2664th meeting of the Security Council 19.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2664.

¹⁸⁰ Provisional verbatim record of the 2665th meeting of the Security Council 20.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2665.

made the entire Security Council and the UN undemocratic.¹⁸¹ Iran had in many of its letters accused the Council for not carrying out its duties according to the Charter, and the Libyan representative shared this view.¹⁸²

These meetings in February do not only show that Iran had almost all states in the region against them, but they also show what issues were important. Chemical weapons did not harm anyone except Iran, and it was therefore not on other regional states' agenda than Iran's. Attacks on ships in the Gulf were a major problem for other states, especially the Gulf States. Not only did the tanker war endanger peace in the Gulf, but it also threatened other states' economies.

The Focus of the Council and the Secretary-General in 1986

The Security Council had not adopted any resolutions on the Iran-Iraq war since resolution 552 (1984) in 1984, but the escalation of the warfare in 1985 and the first months of 1986 made a new one urgent. Almost two years had gone by, but the previous resolution had not been adopted unanimously, which showed that the Security Council was divided in how they should approach and solve the conflict. A united Council would be a basic necessity to solve the conflict. The resolution showed the complexity of the war, as well as how difficult it was to solve it, even for third party states. The resolution had been an utter failure, and Iran had refused to negotiate.

The meeting of the Security Council in February 1986

The Security Council member states needed time to work on a new resolution they could agree on. The Security Council meeting in advance of the voting on the new resolution took place 24 February 1986. Representatives from Thailand, The United Kingdom, The Soviet Union, USA, China, Denmark, Australia, Madagascar and France spoke on the issue, and it is clear from the verbatim record that states outside the region had a wider perspective on the conflict than the Arab states.

¹⁸¹ Provisional verbatim record of the 2665th meeting of the Security Council 20.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2665.

¹⁸² Idem.

Thailand, which was not a member of the Non-Aligned Movement and not a close ally of any of the superpowers either, spoke in clear text about the conflict. Thailand reminded the Security Council of Iran's declination to be present in the meetings and to speak its case. The Council had therefore only heard one side of the story. The representative from Thailand also said that the war was "initiated by one side, continued by the other", which indirectly meant that Iraq began the war. As the Arab states except Libya had spoken for earlier, also Thailand urged for peace in the long-lasting conflict. The use of chemical weapons was an aspect that Thailand paid great importance to as it breached the Geneva Protocol and was an inhumane weapon. Thailand feared that the prolongation of the conflict would lead to escalated use of it. Thailand asked the Secretary-General to pay specific attention to the use of chemical weapons, which was allegedly used by both Iran and Iraq. The aspect of chemical weapons was included in the Secretary-Generals eight-point plan for peace, and Thailand therefore urged both Iran and Iraq to respect this point.¹⁸³

The British representative elaborated on his colleague from Thailand's arguments, and specified that the illegal weapon had been used against Iranian troops, and thereby indirectly making Iraq responsible for the crime. That matter could not be set aside or be treated as a minor obstacle to the peace process, according to the Brit. Peace was the ultimate goal, which should be worked for in a step-by-step plan arranged by the UN, and it had to be acceptable for both sides.¹⁸⁴

The US had condemned the use in the past, and repeated the condemnation at the Security Council meeting. The American representative expressed his concern over the use in a time when the world had abstained from using it for a long period of time. The use now did not only breach international law, but it also ruined years of international cooperation.¹⁸⁵ China shared the same view as The UK, and highlighted that the terms for peace had to be acceptable and reasonable for both parties. They also opposed the use of bacterial and chemical weapons.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Provisional verbatim record of the 2666th meeting of the Security Council 24.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2666.

¹⁸⁴ Idem.

¹⁸⁵ Idem.

¹⁸⁶ Idem.

Australia also proclaimed their concerns, which particularly were the use of chemical weapons. Denmark, Madagascar and France encouraged the adoption of the new resolution, but did not utter any particular stand on the use of chemical weapons.¹⁸⁷ Neither did the Soviet Union, which had been one of the countries that helped Iraq develop chemical weapons.

The use of chemical weapons concerned some states more than others. Arab states, which officially supported Iraq or which preferred Iraq to Iran, did not mention the aspect of poison gas at all, or they criticised the Council and the Secretary-General for focusing too much on it. Western states, many of them members of the NATO, Non-Aligned countries outside the Middle East, and neutral states to the conflict and the Cold war, saw the use of chemical weapons as one of the major issues in the war.

The war could not be settled without addressing the problem. It is probable that these countries did not see the Iran-Iraq war as an isolated conflict, but as a war in a world where it had the potential to influence other conflicts in negative ways. However, no matter how grave they viewed the use, they did not go beyond condemnation of it, but so far, condemnation and declared concern about the use of chemical weapons had not prevented Iraq from using chemical weapons earlier in the war.

Resolution 582 (1986)

Resolution 582 was voted for 24 February 1986. The Security Council recalled decisions taken during the (at that time) six-year long conflict, and that both Iran and Iraq were parties to the charter, which obliged states to settle conflicts peacefully. The aspect of chemical weapons was dealt with carefully, but taken seriously in the resolution.

In resolution 585 (1986) the Security Council noted that both Iran and Iraq were parties to the Geneva Protocol, which prohibited the use of asphyxiating, poisonous and other gases, and bacteriological methods in warfare.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the Security Council deplored the escalation of the conflict, the breach of humanitarian law, attacks on neutral shipping and aircrafts, but particularly the use of chemical weapons. Finally

¹⁸⁷ Provisional verbatim record of the 2666th meeting of the Security Council 24.2.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2666.

¹⁸⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 582 of 24 February 1986.

the Security Council urged the conflicting parties to settle their disputes peacefully and to end the war. The Security Council adopted resolution 582 unanimously.¹⁸⁹

Iraq and Iran's responses to resolution 582 (1986)

Iraq was positive to the resolution, which Iraq saw as a basic framework for peace negotiations. However, Iraq was only willing to cooperate if Iran accepted the resolution unconditionally¹⁹⁰

Iran, on the other hand, had a different stand to it. Iran appreciated the efforts of the Secretary-General, and said the resolution was a positive step on the point of condemning Iraq as the aggressor of the war. However, Iran could not accept the resolution, because it was unbalanced and inadequate, and reflected the unequivocal and vague position the Security Council had towards the war.¹⁹¹ Iran repeated its previous demands, which were necessary to address if Iran should accept a resolution. First of all, Iraq had to be condemned for initiating the war by invading Iran. Second, Iraq had to be condemned for the use of chemical weapons. Third, Iraq had to be condemned for crimes and threats against aviation, as well as participation in hijacking. The Council also had to take decisive position against Iraq because of their attacks on neutral vessels and civilian centres.¹⁹²

Iran also criticised the Council for not taking action against chemical weapons. The Council had condemned the use of chemical weapons against Iranian forces in the statement of 25 April 1985, and Iran expected that Iraq should be condemned by name in a resolution. According to Iran, the Council took a milder position to the use of chemical weapons in resolution 582 (1986), which was a major setback. Iran also criticised "certain permanent members" for being one-sided and partial in the conflict. That prevented the resolution from being fair, and it prevented the Council from finding a solution. The continuation of the war was thus the Council's responsibility.¹⁹³ "Certain permanent members" was the US. The US had been Khomeini's prime enemy since the Islamic revolution and the hostage crisis. Khomeini had also criticised international

¹⁸⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 582 of 24 February 1986.

¹⁹⁰ Letter 5.3.1986 from representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17897.

¹⁹¹ Letter 25.2.1986 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17864.

¹⁹² Idem.

¹⁹³ Idem.

communism for being just as bad as the US and for the Soviets relations to Iraq, so the reference might have been directed at the Soviet Union as well.¹⁹⁴

Despite the lukewarm reception of resolution 582 (1986) by Iran, it received positive response from other UN member states in the following weeks. The European Community, for example, urged the two fighting parties to accept resolution 582 (1985) to settle the conflict.¹⁹⁵

Continued Efforts by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General writes in his memoirs that he felt that the permanent members of the Security Council worked against him. They supported resolutions, but did not take any actions to prevent a continuation of the conflict. On the contrary, he felt that the permanent members took actions, which escalated and prolonged the conflict. France for instance, started selling war systems to Iran.¹⁹⁶ As mentioned above, France had sold warplanes to Iraq. The Secretary-General still continued his work, and sent a mission to Iran and Iraq to investigate the use of chemical weapons again.

The mission was sent on 26 February to 3 March 1986 to Iran, and consisted of three specialists, while a fourth joined in on the examination of the findings in Switzerland. All were the same as in the previous missions.

The number of casualties alarmed the specialists, especially since the UN had condemned the use of chemical weapons. It was also clear that chemical weapons were used on a more intense scale than before.¹⁹⁷ The task was to investigate whether chemical weapons had been used or not, and if they were, to what extent, what type, and in what circumstances. The mission only carried out investigations in Iran, as Iraq had previously declined the request to conduct examinations on Iraqi territory. The investigations were carried out in forms of interviews with Iranian Government officials, visits to the Abadan area where samples were collected, clinical examinations and interviews of victims, as well as an interview with an Iraqi pilot who had been captured

¹⁹⁴ Tarock, *The Superpower' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 40-41.

¹⁹⁵ Letter 7.8.1986 from representative of the UK to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18266.

¹⁹⁶ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 149.

¹⁹⁷ Report of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to investigate the use of chemical weapons: Note by the Secretary-General 12.3.1986. UNSC document S/17911.

and other Iraqi prisoners of war.¹⁹⁸ The report dealt with medical aspects, chemical aspects, munitions aspects and testimony of Iraqi personnel. The conclusion was clear: Chemical weapons had been used in the form of aerial bombs against Iranian positions by Iraqi forces. The Iraqi pilot who was interviewed confirmed this. The chemical agent used was mainly mustard gas (yperite), but traces of nerve gases were also found. The extent of it could not be determined, but the specialists saw 700 casualties in Ahwaz and Tehran, which indicated that the use of chemical weapons had increased since 1984.¹⁹⁹

The interviews with the Iraqi prisoners of war and the Iraqi pilot were the first time Iraqi personnel admitted that they had used chemical weapons. The report was also the first official UN document where it was specifically stated that chemical weapons had been used against Iranians by Iraqi forces.

The mission's report was a shift from what had previously been written and published by UN officials as the violator was identified. However, the Secretary-General did not repeat that it was Iraqi forces that had used chemical weapons in his note, which is discussed in the chapter below. The need for a clear and direct condemnation is also something Iran requested in a letter to the Secretary-General 18 March.²⁰⁰

The Secretary-General's response to the latest report

The Secretary-General instructed new investigations to be carried out after repeated requests from Iran to do so in the three first months of 1986, after Iraq had resumed its use of chemical weapons. In his note, the Secretary-General summed up the efforts made by himself and the Security Council, in addition to elaborate on the circumstances of the mission he dispatched, as well as commenting on it.

At this point, 12 March, only Iraq had responded positively to resolution 582 (1986), and the Secretary-General stressed that in the meanwhile he was determined to pursue every way that could lead to an end of the conflict and which could minimize the suffering. The report had concluded that chemical weapons had once again been used, and the Secretary-General repeated that he condemned the use of it wherever and whenever it occurred. He also specified that this time chemical weapons had been used

¹⁹⁸ Report of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to investigate the use of chemical weapons: Note by the Secretary-General 12.3.1986. UNSC document S/17911.

¹⁹⁹ Idem.

²⁰⁰ Letter from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General 18.3.1986. UNSC document S/17925.

“in violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 against Iranian forces”.²⁰¹ By saying this, he addressed the victims, which was important both for Iran, but one can also say that it was important for the war in general as it indirectly identified Iraq as the one behind the violation. Iran had in several letters complained that the failure to make Iraq responsible for it, had led to renewed attacks by Iraq, as their actions did not have any consequences. Finally, the Secretary-General encouraged both Iran and Iraq to end the war in order to restore peace in the area.²⁰²

The Security Council’s response to the latest report

The Security Council discussed the report of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons 21 March 1986. The discussion was not published, but the president came with an official statement after the meeting. He declared the Council’s concerns about the unanimous conclusion of the mission, which confirmed that chemical weapons had been used by Iraqi forces against Iranian forces in the recent Iranian offensives. He condemned the use and urged the two conflicting parties to settle their disputes and comply to Resolution 582 (1986), so peace could be restored.²⁰³ This was the first time Iraq was named as the user of chemical weapons by the Security Council, which at an international level was important because it made Iraq responsible for breaking the Geneva Protocol. However, a statement by the Security Council was not as strong as a resolution, nor was it binding. Still, this was a triumph to Iran as they had called for an identification of Iraq as user of chemical weapons since 1983.

Iran’s relations to the Security Council in 1986

The use of chemical weapons did not stop despite the new efforts and the condemnation. Iran once again called for a decisive action from the Security Council, and Khorassani said:

²⁰¹ Report of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to investigate the use of chemical weapons: Note by the Secretary-General 12.3.1986. UNSC document S/17911.

²⁰² Idem.

²⁰³ Statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council 21.3.1986. UNSC document S/17932.

[...] it should have gone beyond mere condemnation and, following so oft-repeated cases of the deployment of chemical weapons by Iraq, it should have acted more decisively and punitively vis-à-vis the unequivocal report of the Secretary-General on the Iraqi use of chemical weapons against Iranian troops.²⁰⁴

Iran was in general not satisfied with only a condemnation from the Secretary-General. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran called for a resolution by the Security Council, which identified and condemned Iraq as the aggressor and violator of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 in response to the Secretary-General's statement. Khorassani was of the opinion that the Security Council and the UN in general did not act according to its responsibilities, but he warned the Council and states of taking sides in the war. The US was addressed specifically to stay out of the conflict.²⁰⁵

Iraq launched another attack against Iran in May. Iraq surprised Iran and took the Iranian border city Mehran, which was an important city strategically, because it was one of the main routes for Iranian attacks into Iraq. It also boosted Iraqi moral.²⁰⁶ Iraq did not manage to take the mountains surrounding Mehran, which gave Iran an opportunity to strike back. Iran did, and Iraq had to admit their defeat by early July.²⁰⁷

The Security Council's work in autumn 1986

The President of the Security Council sent a letter to the Secretary-General 29 August 1986, where he spoke on behalf of all the members of the Security Council. The Security Council were alarmed by the escalation of the war, and in particular the threats against neighbouring countries, and the attacks on merchant shipping and on civilian targets. The council encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his peace mediation, and pointed especially out that extra effort should be put in the area of preventing the use of chemical weapons and attacks on civilian areas.²⁰⁸ The Secretary-General had already sent missions to investigate the use of chemical weapons, and his possibilities to do

²⁰⁴ Letter 26.3.1986 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17944.

²⁰⁵ Letter 27.3.1986 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17949.

²⁰⁶ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p.227-228.

²⁰⁷ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p.151.

²⁰⁸ Letter 29.8.1986 from the President of the Security Council to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18305.

something past that were limited. The Security Council had more options to prevent any further use of gas, but the Council indirectly disclaimed its liability.

Even though the war was discussed and given a lot of attention on international level, it still continued. The Tanker war showed the differences in military strength between the two parties, and it was clear that Iraq was superior when it came to air power.²⁰⁹ Iran's chance to win the war was therefore dependent on the land war.

The land war in autumn 1986

Karbala 2 was launched in northern Iraq 31 August, and Iran managed to take some territory together with Kurdish fighters.²¹⁰ Karabla 3 followed the next day, 1 September. The aim was to take Iraqi oil platforms in the Gulf, but the attack failed and Iran stepped up its controls of vessels in the Gulf instead.

Ayatollah Khomeini continued to warn that the final battle to end the war would soon take place, but the land fighting ceased in the autumn of 1986. Only small land operations were carried out, and the fighting was exhausting for both sides.

Instead, the War of the Cities, and the Tanker war continued and escalated in the autumn of 1986. Iraq continued the air attacks on border towns, military targets and on oil installations. Tehran was also attacked, but it was the loading points at Larak Island and Kharg Island that were the main targets.²¹¹ The attacks were quite successful from an Iraqi point of view, and it showed that the Iranian defence systems were either destroyed, out of date or simply not efficient enough. The attacks also raised the Iranian allegations that Iraq used Saudi-Arabia as a pit stop, since Larak is situated in the Strait of Hormuz and too far off Iraq to fly back and forth without refuelling.

Iran was subordinate when it came to air power and long-distance missiles, but had to retaliate somehow. Iran therefore fired Scud missiles at Baghdad and Basra, and escalated its attacks on tankers in the Gulf. An average of one ship a week was lost, which upset the Gulf States even more.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 171.

²¹⁰ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 152.

²¹¹ Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons of Modern War*, 242-244.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 244.

Resolution 588 (1986)

The attention and effort of the Security Council and the Secretary-General in the spring of 1986 died down during the summer when the fighting decreased. However, Ayatollah Khomeini's warnings of a new, final offensive made it clear that new full-scale fighting and escalation of the war were imminent. Iraq's response to resolution 582 (1986) had been positive, as their responses had been since they lost the initiative in the war, but the answer from Iran had also been much more optimistic than previous responses.

The Security Council had to seize the opportunity when there were hopes of negotiations, and met to discuss the issue in the beginning of October. Other states, including Iraq, had requested to take part in the discussions of the issue. The discussion in advance of resolution 582 (1986) had focused on the tanker war. The discussions in October showed a turn of focus from the Tanker war to an urgent need to stop the war.

The Secretary-General made a statement before the discussion in the Council started, where he admitted that his eight-point plan, which sought to end the war, had not been successful. The war now threatened to spread to the entire region and to draw in Powers from other parts of the world as well. The vital question was, therefore, what new efforts could be deployed to stop the war?²¹³ The key holder to this question was Iran, and he urged Iran to present its case to the Council, so negotiations could be initiated. In the meantime, the Secretary-General would continue his peace efforts.²¹⁴

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Chedli Klibi, was the first speaker, and he urged the Council to agree on effective actions, which would end the war, and referred to chapter VI of the UN charter. He had spoken warmly of Iraq in the discussion in February, but focused on a peace that would be agreeable to both parties in the discussions in October.²¹⁵

The representative of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, and the representative of Egypt agreed with Klibi and urged the Council to take measures so peace could be established.²¹⁶

Representatives from Senegal, Oman, PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization), Argentina, Jordan and Rwanda also called for peace.²¹⁷ Neither of them were members

²¹³ Provisional verbatim record of the 2709th meeting of the Security Council 3.10.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2709.

²¹⁴ Idem.

²¹⁵ Idem.

²¹⁶ Idem.

of the Security Council, but requested to speak because the war endangered peace in the region and the world in general.

Representatives from Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bulgaria, Mexico, Chad, Bangladesh, Cuba, and GDR (German Democratic Republic) also called for the Security Council to take responsibility in a meeting three days later.²¹⁸ None of these countries were members of the Security Council either, but the number and spectre of countries show that the international community was united in their stand towards the Iran-Iraq war, and it shows how important it was to achieve peace, not only for states in the Middle East and the Gulf region, but for the whole world. The war threatened to spread to the entire region, and the Tanker War made the export of oil from the region unstable. The war had also lasted for six years, but led nowhere.

Other countries, which were not members of the Security Council, but which spoke in the discussions, were Tunisia, Guyana, Yugoslavia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Uruguay, Morocco, Peru, and Mauretania.²¹⁹

Denmark and Australia, which both were members of the Security Council in 1986, agreed to the overall wish to stop the war, but also specified that the use of chemical weapons was unacceptable. The Australian representative also urged the members of the UN not to sell arms to the belligerents – that was how the war was able to continue and escalate. The Danish representative stressed that the disrespect of international laws was a frightening development, which the Council had an obligation to respond to.²²⁰ Denmark had previously not made any official comments on the issue of chemical weapons, but it is clear that the concerns were growing, as they now took a firm stand towards it.

Only the UK of the permanent members in the Security Council commented on the use of chemical weapons. The British representative repeated the UK's condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, and stressed the importance of

²¹⁷ Provisional verbatim record of the 2710th meeting of the Security Council 3.10.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2710.

²¹⁸ Provisional verbatim record of the 2711th meeting of the Security Council 6.10.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2711.

²¹⁹ Provisional verbatim record of the 2713th meeting of the Security Council 8.10.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2713.

²²⁰ Provisional verbatim record of the 2712th meeting of the Security Council 7.10.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2712.

upholding international law. It should be added, that the British representative also addressed other grave aspects of the war as well, namely the attacks on civilians.²²¹

The members of the Security Council then voted on resolution 588 (1986). This resolution was not new in any ways, and did not mention the use of chemical weapons in particular or any other aspect of the conflict, but called upon Iran and Iraq to implement resolution 582 (1986). Its main message was that it called upon Iran and Iraq to implement resolution 582 (1986) from February. The resolution also requested the Secretary-General to continue his peace efforts, and to keep the Council updated on his work. Resolution 588 (1986) was also adopted unanimously.²²² In other words, it brought no new aspects to the table.

One might ask why the Security Council resorted to repeat the previous one when they knew that changes had to be done. Iran had been very clear that resolution 582 (1986) failed to condemn Iraq as the aggressor, failed to condemn Iraq for its use of chemical weapons, and failed to condemn Iraq for attacking aviation.²²³ These issues were crucial to Iran, and Iran had not given any signals that they would abandon their demands. On the bright side, resolution 588 (1986) showed that the Iran-Iraq war was still an important and current issue for the Security Council, which was important especially in regard to Iran, who had previously accused the Council for ignoring the conflict. It is also likely to believe that resolution 582 (1986) was what the Council could agree upon at the time, and that they hesitated to stress a new resolution that the member states could not even agree upon. The Secretary-General was not satisfied with the resolution either, and he understood that he would not get any help from the Council.²²⁴

The responses from the two belligerents were as expected. Iraq reaffirmed its willingness to cooperate, and repeated its demands from its response to resolution 582 (1986), namely immediate ceasefire and withdrawal to internationally recognized borders.²²⁵ Iran repeated that they could not accept a resolution, which did not condemn Iraq as the aggressor or that did not prevent chemical weapons use, attacks on naval vessels, attacks on civil aviation or breaches on humanitarian law. However, Iran

²²¹ Provisional verbatim record of the 2713th meeting of the Security Council 8.10.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2713.

²²² United Nations Security Council Resolution 588 (1986)

²²³ Letter 25.2.1986 from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/17864.

²²⁴ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 150.

²²⁵ Report of the Secretary-General 26.11.1986. UNSC document S/18480 annex 2.

welcomed new peace efforts, and the Secretary-General's eight-point plan could serve as a basis for it.²²⁶

The Security Council had requested the Secretary General to continue his peace efforts, and report back to the Council, and the Secretary-General submitted another report after resolution 588 (1986) 26 November 1986.

In the report, the Secretary-General repeated the necessity of the conflicting parties to accept resolution 582 (1986), despite Iran's crystal clear demands. The focus of the Secretary General's report was mainly on the Tanker war. The events in the summer and autumn months of 1986, where third party merchant ships were increasingly attacked alarmed the Secretary-General, and his major concern was that the conflict would escalate to include neighbouring states in the warfare. His and the Security Council's major goal had always been to end the conflict, and this was now more important than ever. However, he understood that there were too many underlying factors that had to be solved before peace could be achieved, and a basis therefore had to be created so that Iran and Iraq could end the hostilities.²²⁷

New Revelations: The US' Double Game

The Iran-Contra Scandal and the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers

In November 1986, the Syrian magazine Al Shiraa revealed that the US had sold weapons to Iran on several occasions in 1985 and 1986. Israel functioned as a transfer country. Also, a US Security Advisor had visited Iran. In return, Iran had helped free American hostages held by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon.²²⁸ The sales became known as the Iran-Contra Scandal and shocked the world, especially Iraq and other Gulf States. The US refused to recognize the new regime in Iran, so the news of the arm sales was embarrassing for the Reagan administration. As a result, the credibility of President Reagan dropped among the US citizens, European countries and Arab countries.²²⁹ The

²²⁶ Report of the Secretary-General 26.11.1986. UNSC document S/18480 annex 3.

²²⁷ Report of the Secretary-General 26.11.1986. UNSC document S/18480.

²²⁸ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 215-217.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

scandal can also partly explain the Security Council's evasive attitude to the Iran-Iraq war.

The sales to Iran did not mean that the US halted its sales and cooperation with Iraq, however. According to the Chargé d' Affairs of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN, the American newspaper the Washington Post published an article that claimed that the US had given intelligence reports to Iraq since 1984. The intelligence information had been used to plan poison gas attacks. The newspaper had also suggested that the director of CIA had even encouraged Iraq to use chemical weapons.²³⁰

American government never denied the Washington Post's allegations, and Iran used the allegations as propaganda for what it was worth.²³¹

Iraq was not happy, but events in the Gulf made the situation for Iraq better. Kuwait had tilted more and more towards Iraq, and gave its neighbour in the north financial loans, let Iraqi planes fly through Kuwaiti air space, let ships unload military equipment for Iraq in Kuwaiti ports, as well as sold oil for Iraq. As a response, Iran increased its attacks on Kuwaiti ships. Kuwait asked a number of third party states to reflag its tankers, and both the US and the Soviet Union offered to do so.²³² The Superpowers became more and more involved in the war, and the advantage was Iraq's. The reflagging shows that the Superpowers were more and more willing to interfere in the war.

Iranian correspondence with the Secretary-General in December 1986

The President of the Security Council sent a letter to the Secretary-General 22 December, where he urged that resolution 582 (1986) and 588 (1986) should be implemented, and repeated the concerns over the conflict, but paid specifically attention to the attacks of civilian targets, attacks on merchant shipping, and on oil installations of littoral states. The Security Council also expressed concern over the continuation of violation of international humanitarian law and laws of armed conflict.²³³

²³⁰ Letter 15.12.1986 from the representative of Iran to the UN to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18522.

²³¹ Idem.

²³² Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 131.

²³³ Provisional verbatim record of 2730th meeting of the Security Council 22.12.1986. UNSC document S/PV.2730.

Iran launched a new offensive, Karbala IV, aimed at Basra 23 December. However, Iraq knew that the offensive would come, and was prepared. Iraq increased its forces and defences considerably after the Fao disaster, and halted the Iranian attack after a few days. Iran claimed in a letter to the Secretary-General that Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iranian troops again on the eastern side of the Shatt al Arab.²³⁴

Iran also reported that mustard gas had been used against Iranian positions on the western front 31 December, and 400 had been injured.²³⁵ 20 died in the attack, and the Iranian representative to the UN requested the Secretary-General to send a new mission to Iran to visit the victims and the sites where chemical weapons had been used.²³⁶ The request was repeated in a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Ali Akbar Velayati, to the Secretary-General. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also warned the Secretary-General if he failed to take serious and constructive steps in halting the Iraqi use of chemical weapons, Iran would have to resort to preventive measures themselves as a legal way of defending themselves.²³⁷ Iran had previously threatened to retaliate in kind with the use of chemical weapons. The Minister of Foreign Affairs thus moderated this threat, but at the same time made the Secretary-General responsible for the counter measures Iran would take. No doubt, the use of chemical weapons was one of the gravest aspects in the war to Iran.

It was evident at this point that the deployment of chemical weapons had become an integrated part of Iraq's defence. The attacks with gas in the beginning of the war had been sporadic and inconsistent, but the increased letters from the Iranian representatives in addition to the reports issued by the Secretary-General show that the use had increased and the deployment had changed for the worse. Iraq had developed better delivery systems, become better at targeting and had learned how to predict wind patterns during 1985 and 1986.²³⁸

Even though it was proven and established that chemical weapons had been used since 1984, the war would experience an increased use of these weapons in 1986, not

²³⁴ Letter 26.12.1986 from the representative of Iran to the UN to the Secretary-General. to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18549.

²³⁵ Letter 2.1.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18553.

²³⁶ Letter 5.1.1987 from the representative of Iran to the UN to the Secretary-General. to the Secretary-General.. UNSC document S/18555.

²³⁷ Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran to the Secretary-General in letter 5.1.1987 from the representative of Iran to the UN to the Secretary-General. to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18556.

²³⁸ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 355.

only on military targets, but also on civilians as well. It should be noted again that Iran used chemical warfare as propaganda as well, and even though it is established that Iraq used chemical weapons frequently, it is still uncertain if all of Iran's reports were true. As discussed earlier, Iran used the attacks to create sympathy from other states. However, 1986 was also a year when the allegations on the use of chemical weapons were taken more seriously, as well as an increased concern about the use, the impact of it and the gravity of the war in general. However, the Security Council failed to take action yet again.

5. The final stages of the war

Spring 1987: The Limitations of Iran Start to Show

The war had entered its seventh year, and Iran sought a final offensive that would end the war. Khomeini declared that Iranian victory would come in the spring of 1987, more specifically before 21 March, the date of the Iranian New Year, Nowruz.²³⁹ Iraq on their side continued their strategy of defence, a strategy that aimed at tiring the Iranian troops out, which in the end would lead to an Iraqi victory or at least force the Iranian leaders to settle for peace. Iraq had, as mentioned above, been willing to negotiate a peace agreement since Iran seized the initiative, but Iran had refused to participate in any negotiations.

Throughout the years, Khomeini had repeated that the war could not be settled and decided at a table – it should be ended on the battlefield.²⁴⁰ This philosophy was maintained despite the enormous losses the war caused, and despite that the war had reached its limits at this time. There were internal, political struggles in Tehran, and it proved more and more difficult to recruit volunteers for the army.

Cordesman and Wagner claim that the mobilization of new Iranian volunteers dropped by 50 % in one year, from 80,000 in 1986 to 40,000 in 1987.²⁴¹ The lack of fresh personnel made the mismanagement in the army more apparent, and showed that Iran's strategy of pouring more and more people into the battlefields, was a strategy that could not work forever. In addition and most importantly, the people of Iran did not support the war as whole-heartedly as they had done when Iran was the one being attacked.²⁴²

Iraq on the other hand, despite being on the defensive since 1981, had managed to build up its army. During the years that had passed in the war, the Iraqi tactics improved, their forces were better trained, their equipment more modern and efficient, and Iraq benefitted from its diplomatic work: third-party states provided Iraq with

²³⁹ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 258.

²⁴⁰ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 161.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 359.

²⁴² Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 357.

weapons, intelligence, technology and economic aid.²⁴³ All these factors began to show in spring 1987, but became evident in the autumn.

Iran continued to attack Iraq in the winter of 1987. Karbala V was a major offensive, which took place in the southern Iraq and began 7 January. 120.000-140.000 Iranian troops, many of them Basij, and 200.000 Iraqi troops took part in the battle.²⁴⁴ Again, the Iranians aimed to cut Basra and Faw off from the rest of Iraq, but again they met a strong Iraqi defence. Iraq had built 200 square kilometres of water barriers, which the Iranians had to cross, and Iraq used artillery, air strikes and poison gas to halt the attack, until they managed to organize a counter attack.²⁴⁵

The first Iraqi counter attacks were, however, unsuccessful, perhaps because Iran took Iraq off-guard even though the Iraqis knew that Karbala 5 was in the planning. Iran took strategic positions at the border, and managed to reach the outskirts of Basra. At its closest, Iranian soldiers were just 15 km east of the city. After the initial confusion, Iraq hit back, and the Iranians did not manage to capture Basra this time either. A month after it had started it turned into a siege, and the Iranian leadership declared the battle as over in the end of February. The battle was bloody for both sides, and it is estimated that 10,000 Iraqis and 40,000 Iranians lost their lives in Karbala 5.²⁴⁶

The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Akbar Velayati, reported of several incidents of chemical weapons attacks in the war zone, but also the Iranian cities of Khorramabad and Bakhtaran were attacked 13 January. According to Velayati, 170 civilians were killed, while another 830 were injured in the two cities.²⁴⁷ The Iranian representative to the UN, Said Rajaie-Khorassani, also reported of repeated use of chemical weapons in January on the Karbala V front.²⁴⁸ The scale of the attacks was not reported, which indicates that they were not big. Still, once again one sees that chemical weapons were used as an integrated part of Iraq's defence.

By this time, Iran had improved its chemical defence gear significantly. Iranian troops carried gas masks, protective clothing, decontamination kits and antidotes to nerve gases.²⁴⁹ How many of the Iranian troops who had this gear is uncertain, however.

²⁴³ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 353-354.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 247-250.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁴⁷ Letter 14.1.1987 from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran to the Secretary-General in letter from representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18601.

²⁴⁸ The Proceedings of the UNSC 42nd year: Subject Index.

²⁴⁹ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 358.

It is also unknown how efficient it was, as poison gas attacks quickly, and often caused panic among the Iranian troops so they failed to use their gear properly. It is still likely to believe that the gear prevented casualties. The letters from Iran to the Secretary-General also indicate that. During 1986 and 1987 Iran continued to report where chemical weapons were launched against them, yet often without numbers of casualties. In the letters where numbers of casualties were given, the numbers were quite low in comparison to previous allegations.²⁵⁰

Land fighting in spring 1987

Karbala VI was also launched in the mid of January, but on the central front. The Iranians still sought to lead off attention and resources from the battle in the south, but Karbala 6 lacked the same intensity as the previous attacks in the north had had. A part of the reason for the lack of intensity was that the Kurdish rebellion had decreased. Turkey, the neighbouring country that also had a major Kurdish population, which was troublesome, had hit down on the Turkish Kurdish Worker's Party, PKK, as well as on the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), when they had attempted to base themselves in the border area.²⁵¹ The Iranians took some new ground, and two new offensives further south followed the two next weeks.

Saddam Hussein ordered new air attacks on Iranian cities, and Tehran, Qom and Isfahan were hit.²⁵²

A second phase of Karbala V was launched in the end of February, but failed in the same way as the previous attack had done. The progress Iran had experienced in the initial years of the counter offensives was now slowed down and even put to a halt. The Iranian representative to the UN once again reported of use of chemical weapons. He claimed Iraq had used them on several occasions between the 25 and 29 January. He asked for a new mission to be sent to Iran to investigate the new attacks. He also criticised the Security Council and the Secretary-General for not giving enough attention to the latest use of chemical weapons.²⁵³ Another letter was sent 9 February, which reported of chemical bombs dropped on the southern front, which indicates that

²⁵⁰ See e.g. letter 6.2.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18675 or 4.5.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18844.

²⁵¹ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 258.

²⁵² Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 154.

²⁵³ Letter 3.2.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18657.

chemical weapons were used continuously in the southern warzone during the Karbala 5 offensive.²⁵⁴

Third-Party States' Focus in 1987

Third-party states' concerns in 1987

The latest Iranian offensive reminded the international society once again of the brutality of war, and it attracted their attention.

The European Community issued a new statement in the end of January, which was conveyed to the Secretary-General from the Belgian representative, where the member countries urged both Iran and Iraq to adopt the two resolutions from 1986. They also repeated their condemnation of chemical weapons.²⁵⁵

The American representative transmitted a statement 30 January from the president of the US, Ronald Reagan, which showed the difference between the European focus on the war and the American focus. President Reagan made it clear that the war threatened American interests, and it threatened the safety of its friends in the region. He condemned Iran for occupying Iraqi territory, and ensured that the US would keep the Hormuz Strait open, so oil could be exported from the region. He also underlined that the US was committed to support its friends in the Gulf region if their safety was threatened.²⁵⁶

A letter of interest came from the representative of Iran to the UN, Khorassani, sent 25 February. In the letter, he claimed that Iran had captured an Iraqi second lieutenant. The lieutenant admitted that Iraq used chemical weapons launched by air bombs and guns on Iranian positions, but that there also had been occasions where Iraq had mistakenly bombed its own forces.²⁵⁷ These sayings undermine the Iraqi claims that Iran had used chemical weapons as well, while the confession support the Iranian allegations that the poisoning of Iraqi forces were caused by their own weapons. Still,

²⁵⁴ Letter 9.2.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18679.

²⁵⁵ Letter 27.1.1987 from the representative of Belgium to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18636.

²⁵⁶ Letter 30.1.1987 from the representative of the US to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18652.

²⁵⁷ Letter 25.2.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18723.

one should keep in mind that the statement came from a lieutenant in Iranian captivity. It should be noted, however, the UN mission in 1986 had interviewed a number of Iraqi soldiers and a pilot in Iranian captivity, and they said the same.

President Ronald Reagan repeated his previous call a month earlier in a statement transmitted by the American UN representative 27 February. The president's main focus in this statement was on the war in general, and the importance of a peace. He criticised the Iranian government for continuing the war through terror and harassment, also on their neighbours, and it would therefore be crucial to convince Iran to take part in peace negotiations. President Reagan declared that he would ask the American Secretary of State, George Shultz, to lead the international work towards this.²⁵⁸

The US was an officially declared enemy of Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini, and it was specified in a letter the same day as the statement of President Reagan was published, that Iran preferred peace efforts by the Secretary-General.²⁵⁹ The Secretary-General knew that only strong action by the Security Council could end the war.²⁶⁰ Likewise, only measures from the Security Council could stop the use of chemical weapons. At this point, it was clear that the UN had failed to limit the war at any point. The Secretary-General therefore decided to invite the UN ambassadors of the five permanent members of the Council to meet and discuss the war. In the spring of 1987 the five ambassadors met in a number of secret discussions, and the Secretary-General characterized the meetings as "constructive and harmonizing." Still, nothing came from it, only that the Secretary-General was the best-suited mediator.²⁶¹

The threat of external involvement in the warfare

Iraq also escalated its attacks on Iranian oil installations in the Gulf in the spring of 1987. As a response, Iran escalated its assaults on ships sailing in the Gulf, which convinced thirds party states to increase their presence in the Indian Ocean. The US and the British

²⁵⁸ Letter 27.2.1987 from the representative of the US to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18727.

²⁵⁹ Letter 27.2.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18728.

²⁶⁰ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 151.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

navy expanded their fleets in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, while the Soviet Union sent a military frigate to protect its ships sailing to and from Iraq.²⁶²

American intelligence discovered Iranian testing of Chinese Silkworm missiles in late February 1987. The Silkworm missiles had a much longer range than the missiles Iran had previously used, in addition to be much more destructive, and this development alarmed both the Americans and other Gulf States. Kuwait felt more vulnerable than any, because Iran had already threatened to escalate their attacks on Kuwaiti ships. In addition, Kuwaiti Shiites had held demonstrations against the rulers, and a series of bombings had taken place, which could be linked to the Iranian regime.²⁶³ As a result Kuwait sent requests to the US and the Soviet Union, and asked if Kuwaiti ships could sail under their flag. Kuwait thought that it would prevent Iran from attacking, because it could lead to intervention from the superpowers. Both the US and the Soviet Union agreed to reflag Kuwaiti tankers.²⁶⁴

Khomeini had been seriously mistaken in his way of thinking when he thought that the tactics of harassing ships would scare off foreign states, but Kuwait's reasoning also proved wrong. Iran continued to harass vessels from Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, though only with light rockets and small-arm fire, not Silkworm missiles.²⁶⁵

The Actions of the Security Council and the Secretary-General in 1987

Iran continued its series of Karbala offensives. Karbala 7 near Haj Omran in Iraqi Kurdistan in early March, Karbala 8 in the Basra area in early April, and Karbala 9 and 10 in northern Iraq in the mid of April. The offensives in the south gained little, but the offensives in northern Iraq, which were carried out in cooperation with Kurdish groups, made Saddam Hussein aware that the northern front was the weakest point. Kurdish groups had also united against the rule in Baghdad, which made them more effective.²⁶⁶

²⁶² Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p.147.

²⁶³ Ibid., p.144.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 148.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 150.

²⁶⁶ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 157-260.

Iran reported about use of chemical weapons in several letters to the UN during the Karbala 8-10 offensives. Mustard gas was dropped from artillery shells and rockets in the Basrah area 7-9 April, and claimed 140 victims.²⁶⁷

In a letter transmitted by the Iranian UN representative, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Velayati, reported that the cities of Abadan, Khorramshahr and Mared had been attacked in the spring of 1987 too. 100 civilians had been injured, and the chemical agent used was new, according to Velayati. He demanded that the Security Council should take all necessary steps and that the Secretary-General should send a new mission to Iran.²⁶⁸ Two border villages were also attacked with poison gas in April, according to the Iranian representative.²⁶⁹

Iraq also reported of use of chemical weapons in April in a letter sent 15 April. He claimed that Iranian bombs had poisoned 376 Iraqi combatants, while 9 had been killed on the southern front.²⁷⁰ New allegations of Iranian use of chemical weapons followed the next day. Iraqi forces had been attacked by mustard and phosgene gas 12-13 April. No further details were given.²⁷¹ This information was denied and labelled as Iraqi propaganda by Velayati. He once again claimed that the Iraqis had been victim to their own weapons, and he even suggested that Iraq used poison gas deliberately against own forces.²⁷²

In addition to the claims presented by Velayati, Khorrasani reported that Iraqi villages had been bombed with chemical weapons. 24 villages in the Erbil province in northern Iraq had been attacked. Khorassani claimed that the villagers had been forced to say that it was Iranian planes which had dropped the bombs.²⁷³ Allegations of further use of poison gas in the war zone and on civilians were reported in letters in the beginning of May as well.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁷ Letter 10.4.1987 and 13.4.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC documents S/18796 and S/18799.

²⁶⁸ Letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran 13.4.1987 in letter from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18800.

²⁶⁹ Letter 16.4.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18809.

²⁷⁰ Letter from Deputy Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq 15.4.1987 in letter from the representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18806.

²⁷¹ Letter 16.4.1987 from the representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18810.

²⁷² Statement 18.4.1987 in letter 21.4.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18820.

²⁷³ Letter 27.4.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18828.

²⁷⁴ Letters 7.5.1987 and 8.5.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC documents S/18851 and S/18855.

The letters, which contained information about chemical attacks in the spring, show again that the chemical weapons were used as a part of the warfare. Both mustard gas and nerve gases had been used, according to Iran. The attacks claimed low casualties though. This supports the idea that Iraq used chemical weapons as a method for scaring Iranian soldiers and civilians, a method that was successful. Mustard gas was also, as mentioned earlier, a gas that could persist over time in the landscape. By deploying gas in an area, Iraq prevented the Iranians from using the area. One should once again be reminded of that Iranian authorities might have exaggerated the use of chemical weapons.

A New UN Mission to investigate the use of chemical weapons

Iran had requested several times that a mission should be sent to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Iran. When Iraq had alleged Iranian use of poison gas in 1986, Iraq had declined a UN mission to come and investigate the claims. They changed their stand in the spring of 1987, however, and the Secretary-General thus sent a group of experts to both Iran and Iraq 22 April to 3 May.²⁷⁵

The team interviewed government officials in both Iran and Iraq, visited war zones in both countries and examined victims exposed to chemical gas during the Karbala 5 offensive. Investigations were first conducted in Iran. The mission examined both combatants and civilians, and the conclusion was clear that all the examined, which the mission chose, had been victims to mustard gas. The injuries were, however, less severe than the injuries seen in previous investigations. This could be related to the time elapsed since the attacks. Traces of mustard gas were also found in the Khorramshahr area, in air samples taken from the war zone, and in a bomb fragment. The UN mission added that a group of Iranian journalists and photographers had followed them during their stay in Iran, to the mission's dissatisfaction. The mission and the investigations were broadcasted on Iranian television to show how inhumane Saddam Hussein was.²⁷⁶

After investigations in Iran, the mission continued to Iraq. Iraqi victims had clear signs of injuries caused by mustard gas and some of phosgene gas. Soil samples from the area east of Basra also showed traces of mustard gas and a degradation product of

²⁷⁵ Report 8.5.1987 of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General: note by the Secretary-General UNSC document S/18852 and add.1.

²⁷⁶ Idem.

mustard gas, in addition to a precursory agent of mustard gas. The team did not find any shells with traces of gas or shells that could contain gas. The mission could thus not conclude how the injuries were caused, since no weapons were found.²⁷⁷

In the report's conclusion, the mission ascertained that Iraq had used mustard gas and nerve agents against Iranian forces and civilians. The mission also concluded that Iraqi combatants had been injured from mustard gas and probably phosgene gas, but it did not specify by whom.²⁷⁸ In other words, the mission did not identify Iran as aggressor of chemical weapons, and thus left the question open for further speculations that the Iraqi victims had been subject to Iraqi poison gas that had gone wrong or that Iraq had used gas deliberately on its own population. This was of course a victory to Iran, and a blow to Iraq. The mission also recommended that they did not have anything more technical to contribute with, but to assist the UN in their work to prevent more use of chemical weapons. According to the mission's recommendations in the report, only political measures on an international level could prevent further use.²⁷⁹

In his note to the report, the Secretary-General repeated the mission's findings, and regretted the continued use of chemical weapons. The Secretary-General agreed with the mission's recommendation that the commitment to the Geneva Protocol only could be achieved at a political level. He also emphasized that his primary aim at the present time was to end the war, even though he considered the use of chemical weapons as one of the gravest breaches on international law.²⁸⁰

Responses from Iran and the European Community

The Security Council followed up with a statement made by the president 14 May, where they recalled previous statements again condemned the use of chemical weapons by Iraq against Iranian forces. The Council also condemned the use of chemical weapons against civilians and Iranian forces. They urged the two belligerents to accept resolution 582 (1986) and supported the Secretary-General's further work for peace.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Report 8.5.1987 of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General: note by the Secretary-General UNSC document S/18852 and add.1.

²⁷⁸ *Idem.*

²⁷⁹ *Idem.*

²⁸⁰ *Idem.*

²⁸¹ Resolutions and Decisions of the Security Council 1987. Appendix 1.

The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Velayati, thought the Council to be too vague in its statement, and that it simply repeated itself. So far, condemnation of chemical weapons had not prevented Iraq from using it so he turned to the Secretary-General and asked for specific actions to be taken. Missions and reports regarding the matter was in the first place an effective measure, but it had also proved unable to stop the use. Velayati thus suggested that the Secretary-General called on Iraq to commit itself to the conclusions of the report.²⁸²

The European Community issued a statement in the aftermath of the report, where the member countries condemned the use of chemical weapons by Iraq. They would continue their efforts to see the Protocol respected.²⁸³ It is noteworthy to point out that also a big organization like the European Community condemned Iraq for disrespecting the Protocol, which shows both the gravity of the breach, but also the attention it got.

The Land War in 1987

Iran continued to report of continued use of poison gas against both military personnel and civilians in May.²⁸⁴ Bombs with chemical weapons were dropped from planes over two villages in the Baneh region in Iran, not far from the border to northern Iraq, 7 May. 92 civilians were injured.²⁸⁵ Iran also used new means to attract international attention, namely sending pictures of gas victims, and distributing videos of a BBC documentary called *Secrets of Samarra*, which dealt with how Iraq obtained chemicals, how they produced chemical weapons and so on.²⁸⁶

In June 1987 Kurdish fighters with Iranian weaponry supported by Iranian forces launched Operation Fatah, which means victory, in Suleimaniyah in northern Iraq.²⁸⁷ It was, in comparison to the previous offensives in both northern Iraq and of course the battles for Faw and Basra, a small offensive. Chemical weapons were used frequently on

²⁸² Letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran 26.5.1987 in letter from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18878.

²⁸³ Statement 25.5.1987 by the Foreign Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the 12 States members of the EC in letter 27.5.1987 to the UN from the representative of Belgium to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18879.

²⁸⁴ Letter 11.5.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18859.

²⁸⁵ Letter 2.6.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18890.

²⁸⁶ Letters 11.5.1987 and 15.5.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC documents S/18860 and S/18866.

²⁸⁷ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 158.

both the northern and the southern front, according to the Iranian representative to the UN.²⁸⁸ Another major attack on civilians also occurred, according to Rajai-Khorassani. Citizens of Sardasht, a city not far from Baneh in northwestern Iran, were attacked with chemical weapons 28 June. 650 civilians were injured and 10 killed. Once again, Iran called for a UN mission to investigate, and the Secretary-General and the Security Council to take both preventive and punitive actions.²⁸⁹

The land war settled down to small-scale fighting in the summer and autumn of 1987. Robert Johnson, who has a Phd. in war strategies and conflict thinking at Oxford University, views the autumn of 1987 as an evidence of that Iran had reached its limits. Financial problems, lack of equipment and lack of men had pushed the Iranian warfare to a point where Iran was unable to launch offensives in the same scales as it had done in the previous years. Iraq, on the other hand, did not have the capacity to counter attack either.²⁹⁰

Resolution 598 (1987)

The Security Council met again 20 July 1987 to vote over the new resolution, which the five permanent member states' ambassadors had put together.²⁹¹ This time, all the foreign ministers (except from the Soviet Union) met to deal with the war. The discussion reflected a shared opinion that the war had lasted too long, and that peace had to be restored. Other aspects of the war, like the chemical warfare, the situation in the Gulf, PoW and attacks on civilians, were all subordinate to the overall aim; peace.

Several representatives mentioned the other aspects though, as a part of the argumentation of how grave the situation was. In this connection, it should be mentioned that the representative of Ghana, Mr. Gbeho, clarified how destructive the war had been on the Geneva Protocol. The delegation from Ghana viewed the Geneva Protocol as no longer effective, and urged the United Nations organization to review it

²⁸⁸ Letters 10.6.1987, 17.6.1987, 23.6.1987, 25.6.1987 and 29.6.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC documents S/18919, S/18928, S/18941, S/18947 and S/18952.

²⁸⁹ Letter 29.6.1987 from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18953.

²⁹⁰ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 158.

²⁹¹ Members of the Security Council per 20.7.1987 were Argentina, Bulgaria, Congo, Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Ghana, Italy, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Zambia in addition to the permanent members.

in regard to the many loopholes the Protocol had.²⁹² This was the first time that any representative had officially uttered in the Security Council that the Geneva Protocol had played its role, and needed to be edited. It was of course dramatic, as most countries only had stated that it was weakened, not ineffective. However, it set the topic on the agenda, and as we know in retrospect, changes came in the following years.

In resolution 598 (1987), the Security Council reaffirmed resolution 582 (1986), and repeated its concerns over the continuation of the conflict and the scale of it. The Council deplored the bombing of civilians, attacks on neutral shipping and aircraft, and violation of humanitarian law and other laws in armed conflicts. The use of chemical weapons was particularly deplored.²⁹³

The resolution marked differed from previous resolution in that it “acted under articles 39 and 40 of the charter”.²⁹⁴ Article 39 says:

*The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.*²⁹⁵

Article 40 says:

*In order to prevent an aggravation of the situation, the Security Council may, before making the recommendations or deciding upon the measures provided for in Article 39, call upon the parties concerned to comply with such provisional measures as it deems necessary or desirable. Such provisional measures shall be without prejudice to the rights, claims, or position of the parties concerned. The Security Council shall duly take account of failure to comply with such provisional measures.*²⁹⁶

²⁹² Provisional verbatim record 20.7.1987 of the 2750th meeting of the Security Council UNSC document S/PV.2750.

²⁹³ Security Council Resolution 598 (1987) of 20 July 1987.

²⁹⁴ Idem.

²⁹⁵ UN, “Charter of the United Nations: Article 39.”

²⁹⁶ UN, “Charter of the United Nations: Article 40.”

Article 41, which article 39, refers to, says:

*The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.*²⁹⁷

Article 42 says:

*Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.*²⁹⁸

In other words, the resolution specified what measures that could be taken to stop the conflict, and it also opened for UN military intervention in the conflict. The war had lasted for seven years, had been devastating for both Iran and Iraq, threatened to spread to other countries in the region, and international law had been violated. The Security Council finally responded according to their responsibilities manifested in the UN Charter. Such actions were only to be considered if Iran and Iraq did not halt the war themselves, however. The Security Council demanded an immediate ceasefire on land, sea and in the air, which would be the first step in the process of a negotiated peace. A team dispatched by the Secretary-General should observe the ceasefire, and a number of other steps would then be taken so both Iran and Iraq could implement the resolution. In the meantime, other states should restrain from doing anything that could cause an escalation of the conflict.²⁹⁹ The Council voted on the resolution, and the Security

²⁹⁷ UN, "Charter of the United Nations: Article 41."

²⁹⁸ UN, "Charter of the United Nations: Article 42."

²⁹⁹ Security Council Resolution 598 (1987) of 20 July 1987.

Council adopted it unanimously.³⁰⁰ Still, the war continued, and the Council did not take the steps they warned about in the resolution.

The response to resolution 598 (1987) from Iran and Iraq

The responses from the two belligerents were divided, as they had been to previous resolutions. Iran's first response was that the resolution had defects, and that it was obviously influenced by American propaganda.³⁰¹ Iraq welcomed the resolution, and was ready to implement it in co-operation with the Secretary-General.³⁰²

No final response to resolution 598 (1987) was given from Iran. Instead, the Iranian representative turned his focus to the American presence in the Gulf, about which he sent a number of letters to the Secretary-General in the early autumn of 1987.

Iran sent a letter 11 August, however, where Iran made it clear what areas that were important to them. Iran was interested in stability and security in the Persian Gulf, freedom of navigation and the free flow of oil, determination of the aggressor in the war, i.e. Iraq, repatriation of prisoners of war, and practical measures to end the bombardment of civilian areas and the use of chemical weapons.³⁰³ Iran also welcomed the Secretary-General's 8-point step-by-step plan from 1985, and the Secretary-General called for the five permanent members of the Council to discuss whether or not it was possible to implement individual elements at a time, and approach peace that way. However, the Secretary-General insisted that a ceasefire should be implemented first. The four points, which Iran focused on, showed how important the aspect of chemical weapons was for Iran. The opening in arrangements seemed to please the Iranians and negotiations based on resolution 598 (1987) began in New York 24 August 1987.³⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the war continued and threatened to accelerate to new proportions.

³⁰⁰ Provisional verbatim record 20.7.1987 of the 2750th meeting of the Security Council UNSC document S/PV.2750.

³⁰¹ Letter from Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran 24.7.1987 in letter from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/18993.

³⁰² Letter from the Deputy Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq 23.7.1987 in letter 14.8.1987 from the representative of Iraq to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/19045.

³⁰³ Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 162.

³⁰⁴ *Idem*.

The Security Council's official statement in regard to resolution 598 (1987)

The Security Council made a statement on the implementation of resolution 598 (1987), where they declared that they supported the Secretary-General's work, and where they continuously considered taking further steps to comply with the resolution.³⁰⁵

Where the United Nations had had a focus on chemical weapons previously in the war, especially between 1984 and 1986, other events in the war now made a peace more necessary than ever. The situation in the Gulf, where the US was in direct armed confrontations with Iran, threatened to escalate the war to the entire region, and as a result of that the issue of chemical weapons became subordinate. It is also likely to believe that the work with halting the use of chemical weapons had been so unsuccessful, that the Security Council and the Secretary-General abandoned it deliberately. It is also important to point at the increasing involvement of the US in the war. The inability to prevent Iraq from using chemical weapons would prove fatal. As the war closed in, Saddam Hussein was desperate to keep his power in Iraq, and to control the Kurdish population in northern Iraq.

The land war, on the other hand, was limited, and had been so since the spring of 1987. Iran reported of a new chemical attack on another Iranian city, Sumar, 8 October, but no other details were submitted.³⁰⁶

It was not until November that Tehran announced that a new series of offensives would occur. It started with small-scale attacks on the central front and shelling of Basra in November and December. The attacks kept the Iraqis alert, but a major offensive never came.³⁰⁷ Instead, the situation in the Gulf escalated.

The fighting in the first months of 1988

Iran launched one offensive in northern Iraq in January 1988, but the scale of it and whether Iran managed to gain any significant areas of land are disputed.³⁰⁸ Iraq attacked the oil refinery Rey in the end of February, and caused major damage on it. As response,

³⁰⁵ Provisional verbatim record of the 2779th meeting of the Security Council 24.12.1987. UNSC document S/PV.2779.

³⁰⁶ Letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran 9.10.1987 in letter from the representative of Iran to the Secretary-General. UNSC document S/19193.

³⁰⁷ Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 158.

³⁰⁸ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 362-363.

Iran fired three Scud missiles at Baghdad, and thus was the War of the Cities reignited. Iraq retaliated by firing long-range missiles at Tehran and Qom.³⁰⁹

The War of the Cities was reignited in the end of 1987 and the first month of 1988. Iraq fired missiles on Tehran and other big, Iranian cities, while Iran fired missiles on Baghdad. The attacks did not cause any severe material damages or many injuries or deaths, but the bombings of Iranian cities affected the population. The population had heard about the use of chemical weapons on the front, and lately against civilian villages.

What hindered Saddam Hussein from using gas on Tehran? Cordesman and Wagner see a clear connection between the fear of being attacked with gas and the shrinking moral among the population, which became apparent as the war lingered.³¹⁰ Khomeini had since 1983 used the Iraqi attacks with chemical weapons as a proof of the inhumanity of Saddam Hussein and his regime, and thus a way of legitimizing the war against him. Instead, it worked the opposite way, and scared people. The Iranian population feared that Iraqi planes would drop chemical bombs over major Iranian cities.³¹¹

The Bombing of Halabja

Iranian and Kurdish groups launched new offensives in northern Iraq in March. One offensive targeted the city of Khurmali, the second the city of Sulaymaniyah, and the third the town Halabja.³¹² Iraqi forces fled Halabja. The exact details of the context around Halabja are uncertain even today, more than 25 years later, but Iranian and Kurdish forces had not entered Halabja, according to soldiers. They stayed in the mountainous area around for strategic reasons.³¹³

16 March, Iraqi planes flew in over the town of Halabja, which is situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, and is quite sheltered from the rest of Iraq. The planes dropped a number of bombs over the town, and a smoke appeared as soon as the bombs

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 364.

³¹⁰ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 372.

³¹¹ Idem.

³¹² Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 159.

³¹³ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 113.

hit ground.³¹⁴ In the following days, pictures of men, animals, women and children victims to chemical attacks flared over TVs and were showed in newspapers all over the world.³¹⁵ The injuries showed that the gas had worked quickly, and suffocated many of its victims, a sign of nerve gas.³¹⁶ It has later been estimated that 3200-5000 civilians died in the attack, while another 7000-10,000 were injured.³¹⁷

Saddam's bombing of his own population with chemical weapons sparked an outrage in the rest of the world when the event made headlines in Western media a few days later.

The first statement from the American government regarding the incident condemned Iran for it, and encouraged an investigation of Iran's use of chemical weapons. The condemnation was later modified, and Iraq was blamed for it as well, but it is in retrospect obvious that the US government tried to protect Iraq from it.³¹⁸

Other states, like the UK, condemned Iraq immediately. The Security Council waited to comment on it until a report confirmed what happened.

The bombing of Halabja showed that the use of chemical weapons had come out of control, and it showed how important it was to achieve peace. The Secretary-General increased his peace efforts, but focused yet again on a comprehensive peace agreement instead of a step-by-step plan, which he had worked for the past years.

The Secretary-General sent a medical expert to investigate the bombing of Halabja on his own initiative. It was claimed that in advance of the mission, the US and France, two of Iraq's most important suppliers of weapons, had tried to convince the Secretary-General not to send it.³¹⁹ The report, which was published in the midst of April, once again confirmed that chemical weapons had been used on a more intensive scale than before. As a response to the mission's report, the Security Council met 9 May 1988 to vote on a draft resolution submitted by the Federal Republic of Germany (BDR), Italy and Japan. Resolution 612 (1988) was the first resolution based directly on a Secretary-General's report regarding chemical weapons.³²⁰ As previously mentioned, a resolution is more powerful than a statement, as it expects the addressed to comply to it.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 122.

³¹⁵ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 370-371.

³¹⁶ Idem.

³¹⁷ BBC, "1988: Thousands Die in Halabja Gas Attack."

³¹⁸ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 126.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 125.

³²⁰ UNSC Resolution 612 (1988) of 9 May 1988.

The resolution condemned the use of chemical weapons, and affirmed that it was more important than ever to respect the Geneva Protocol. The Security Council expected both sides to refrain from using chemical weapons, and called on other states to establish export controls on chemical products, which could be used to manufacture chemical weapons.³²¹ Resolution 612 (1988) was adopted unanimously.³²²

The Council had previously specified who the user of chemical weapons was. Resolution 612 (1988) did not do that, and Joost R. Hilterman thinks that was due to US diplomats, who worked specifically for a condemnation of both Iran and Iraq.³²³

In other words, resolution 612 (1988) had its positive sides and its negative sides.

On one hand, it was a step forward that the Council responded to the Halabja incident with a resolution rather than a statement. On the other hand, it failed to have any implications for Iraq. In addition, the American response showed that the US no longer tilted towards Iraq, but sided openly with Iraq.



Map: Clip of northern Iraq. Source: Google Maps.

³²¹ UNSC Resolution 612 (1988) of 9 May 1988.

³²² Provisional verbatim record of United Nations Security Council 2812th meeting 9 May 1988. UNSC document S/PV.2812.

³²³ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 128.

The End of the War

Turn of the tide: Iraq strikes back

To be able to launch a major offensive in northern Iraq, Iran had to move troops from the southern front to the northern front. At this time, Iran did no longer have the capacity to conduct a full-force war on both fronts at this stage of the war. This led to an automatic weakening of the Iranian southern front, which created a possibility for Iraqi forces to take over the initiative.

From April 1988, Iraq started to push the Iranian forces back towards its own border. Iraq launched the offensive Blessed Ramadan 17 April at Faw, and retook the peninsula within 35 hours.³²⁴ Chemical weapons were used as an integrated part of their offensive. Instead of using mustard gas, as Iraq had used when they were on the defensive, they used tabun, a nerve gas, when attacking. Tabun is more lethal than mustard gas, but is a lighter gas and does not linger in an area for a long time. That way, Iraqi forces could proceed through the attacked area in relatively short time afterwards.³²⁵ This was the first major Iraqi counterattack since the initial offensives in 1980, and the situation for Iran was no better in the Gulf either.

There had been few attacks on vessels in the Gulf in February, but the lull did not last for long. Despite the threats of involvement from the US, Iran continued to harass ships and place mines, and 14 April USS Samuel B. Roberts, an American frigate, hit a mine. The ship was seriously damaged, but no lives were lost. Still, the US was forced to react, and four days later two Iranian oil platforms in the lower Gulf were attacked by the US. The same day, a number of armed clashes occurred between the US and Iran in the Gulf, which ended with considerable reduction of the Iranian fleet, estimates claim that 50 % of it was destroyed, and Iran retreated back to its shores with its remaining vessels.³²⁶ The US was in armed conflict with Iran, though the Americans claimed that they were only protecting American interests.

The Gulf States welcomed the attacks, and western European states supported the American action, and sent more minesweepers and ships to the Gulf. Two of the

³²⁴ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 374.

³²⁵ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 23-24.

³²⁶ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 377-378.

permanent members of the Security Council were more reluctant to the new events, however. The Soviet Union did not approve of the involvement, and China declared that they would not halt its export of weapons to the region.³²⁷ The Security Council had disagreed on several matters during the war, and the events in the Gulf had led to a further split between the permanent members. The Soviet Union had several times warned of an escalated presence of the US in the region. Moscow viewed the military presence of the US as a way to influence and exploit the situation to the US' advantage.³²⁸ No doubt, the situation led to difficulties for the two superpowers to cooperate in the Security Council, which eventually led to a locked situation in regard to many decisions in the Council. Behind closed doors, the Security Council discussed an eventual arms embargo on Iran, but the Soviet Union opposed this measure, and the embargo was thus never implemented.³²⁹

The fighting and peace efforts in spring 1988

Despite there being a resolution and perhaps because of its vague language, resolution 612 (1988) did not prevent Iraq from using gas again. Iraq launched a new attack on the southern front in the end of May. Iran did not make the attack easy, but a combination of conventional weapons and chemical weapons eventually broke through the Iranian lines, and Iraq recaptured the border city of Shalamchah, 25 km east of Basra.³³⁰ During this period, Iraq conducted a series of attacks in northern Iraq as well, which forced Iranian forces to withdraw. Despite these setbacks, Khomeini refused to negotiate.³³¹ The Secretary-General invited both Iran and Iraq to participate in new peace talks in the end of May, but neither of them was really interested in it. In addition, the split in the Security Council made the situation difficult. The Soviet Union and China both declared their unwillingness to implement sanctions, which were quite essential to limit the warfare as the two countries sold war equipment to both Iran and Iraq.³³² The situation

³²⁷ Ibid., 380 and 384.

³²⁸ Hiro, *The Longest War*, 229.

³²⁹ Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair*, 125.

³³⁰ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 383.

³³¹ Idem.

³³² Ibid., 385.

seemed impossible to solve, but it is known in retrospect that the Secretary-General continued his peace efforts in silence.³³³

Iran tried to counterattack on 13 June, but the attack only led to intense fighting, and the Iranian forces were driven back by Iraqi artillery, airstrikes and chemical weapons.³³⁴ It was obvious that Iraq had acquired the initiative in the war. Iraq's next move was to launch an offensive in the Mehran area on the central front. An important part of the Iraqi forces that attacked was the Chemical Corps, and substantial amounts of nerve gas were used in the attacks. Most of the civilians had fled Mehran though, but Iranian forces still tried to hold the city, because of its strategic importance.³³⁵

Iraq also attacked the northern part of the northernmost of Majnoon Islands in the end of June. The area fell easily to Iraqi artillery and poison gas. Iran later claimed that 4000 Iranian combatants had nerve gas related injuries, while 60 of them had succumbed from it.

Iraq had denied the use of gas in response to Iran's first allegations of the use of it. After the initial correspondence, Iraq had ignored the allegations, and did not bother to deny it. In the spring of 1988, the Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, admitted the use of gas, but excused it on the grounds that Iran had used it first. The Geneva Protocol only forbids first use of chemical, biological and asphyxiating gases, not retaliation, and Aziz thus claimed that Iraq had not broken the Protocol. In response to criticism from the West, he said: "There are different views on this matter from different angles. You are living on a civilized continent. You are living on a peaceful continent."³³⁶

The final weeks of the war were dramatic. Iranian gunboats attacked more ships on 2 and 3 July in the Gulf, and American ships rushed to it to counterattack and to relieve the vessels attacked by the gunboats. At the same time as the encounters in the Gulf, one of the American war ships there, USS Vincennes, spotted an approaching plane on its radar. The plane's flight path was direct on the Vincennes, and the crew on the American warship failed to identify the aircraft, but thought it to be an F-14. It did not respond to the warnings Vincennes sent out on the MAD (Military Air Distress) or the IAD (International Air Distress) frequency either. The plane was shot down. Later it

³³³ Ibid., 387.

³³⁴ Ibid., 386.

³³⁵ Idem.

³³⁶ As cited in Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 389.

showed that it was the Iran Air flight 655 on its way from Tehran to Dubai with 290 civilians onboard.³³⁷ The incident shocked the world and especially Iran, whose rulers now most likely understood that the US was a real threat. Still Iranian gunboats continued to harass tankers the following days, and new encounters with the American navy occurred.³³⁸

Iraq launched new offensives to pressure Iranian forces out of Iraqi territory, and accomplished that on the southern and central front by 12 July. Iraq also advanced almost 40 km into Iran on the central front, but withdrew after a couple of days.³³⁹ Iran still held positions in northern Iraq, but Iraq gave Iran a choice: withdraw from northern Iraq or southern Iran would be invaded. Iran withdrew.³⁴⁰

17 July, Khomeini sent a letter to the Secretary-General where he declared that Iran was ready to accept UNSC resolution 598. The next day, Saddam Hussein declared that Iraq did not have any intentions to continue the war, and requested peace negotiations.³⁴¹ In a letter from Khomeini to the Secretary-General 18 July, Khomeini gave up the downing of the Iranian airliner and the increasing and aggressive use of chemical weapons as reasons for the acceptance of resolution 598 (1987).³⁴² Iraq conducted bombings of Iranian industrial plants the following days, but Khomeini finally accepted a ceasefire 20 July, despite it being “more deadly than taking poison.”³⁴³

Discussions started the following days and lasted for weeks, because Iran and Iraq disagreed on the technical aspects of an agreement, and because many details had to be sorted out. In addition, Iran refused to participate in direct talks with Iraq. Clashes occurred the following week until Iraq agreed to a cease fire 6 August, and the fighting was officially ended two days later.³⁴⁴ The Security Council announced that the ceasefire came into effect 0300 hours GMT on 20 August 1988. Direct talks between the two belligerents followed the next months in Geneva under the Secretary-General’s auspices.

³³⁷ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 391-392.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 395.

³³⁹ *Idem.*

³⁴⁰ *Idem.*

³⁴¹ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 396.

³⁴² Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 170.

³⁴³ As cited in Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 397.

³⁴⁴ Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 398.

The lessons from the Iran-Iraq War regarding chemical weapons

The final resolution regarding chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war was issued 26 August 1988. This draft resolution was drafted by Western Germany, Italy, Japan and the UK.³⁴⁵ The Security Council recalled resolution 612 (1988) from May, and based its new resolution on the reports from 20 and 25 July, 2 and 19 August, which confirmed that chemical weapons had been used continuously, and in an escalated way against Iranians. The use was condemned, and the council expressed concern by the possibility that such weapons would be used in the future.

To prevent use in the future, the Council encouraged the Secretary-General to investigate all allegations that might come, so facts could be established. All states were called upon to restrict its export of substances that could be used to manufacture chemical weapons, especially to states involved in conflicts. If more incidents of chemical weapons were committed, either by Iran or Iraq or other states in other parts of the world subject to the Geneva Protocol, the Council would consider using effective measures to stop the use immediately.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Provisional verbatim record of United Nations Security Council 2825th meeting 26 August 1988. UNSC document S/PV.2825.

³⁴⁶ UNSC Resolution 620 (1988) of 26 August 1988.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to find out how the Security Council and the Secretary-General responded to the use of chemical weapons.

The presentation of the Security Council and the Secretary General's responses to the use of chemical weapons has shown that they failed to halt the use, and that Iraq continued to use chemical weapons repeatedly from 1983 until 1988 because the Security Council and the Secretary General never responded decisively or hard enough. The hypothesis "The Security Council did not respond hard enough to stop the use of chemical weapons" is thus correct. The first Security Council resolutions condemned the use of chemical weapons, but did not condemn Iraq as violator of the Geneva Protocol. Iranian soldiers and civilians were identified as victims of chemical weapons in statements after two years, but the Council condemn Iraq for it. The Security Council never imposed any preventive or punitive measures either, and it is argued in this thesis that the lack of response led to an escalation of the use of chemical weapons. It should be highlighted that the Secretary-General approached the issue of chemical weapons a number of times. He sent missions to Iran and Iraq frequently to investigate the use of chemical weapons. He was also worked for peace, and realized that the issue of chemical weapons was one, which had to be approached if peace should be achieved. However, his powers were limited. The real power to take measures to stop the use of chemical weapons lay within the Security Council.

So why did the Security Council respond the way it did? The answer is a combination of different factors, which can be summed up individually, but must be seen in relation to each other.

The permanent members of the Security Council tilted towards Iraq

Iraq was an ally of the Soviet Union when the war broke out in 1980. The other Superpower in the Cold war, the US, had lost its ally Iran when the Islamic regime seized power in Iran and held Americans hostage at the American Embassy in Tehran. The US was therefore hostile to Iran, and tilted more and more towards Iraq as Iran gained the initiative in the war. Saddam Hussein was not a reliable ally he either, but he was to prefer over Ayatollah Khomeini. The tilt became especially evident when Iran harassed

and attacked oil tankers in the Gulf. The Iran-Contra Scandal revealed that the US had sold weapons to Iran, but the US still favoured Iraq over Iran. Iraq was thus a country that both the US and the Soviet Union tilted towards and eventually supported in the Cold War. None of the other permanent members of the Security Council tilted towards Iran either. The hypothesis “The Security Council did not want to implement efficient measures against the use of chemical weapons, because the Council favoured Iraq over Iran” is therefore also correct.

Measures to stop the use of chemical weapons were never discussed

The conclusion above shows that the hypothesis “The members of the Security Council disagreed on what measures which should be taken to punish and prevent further use of chemical weapons” was wrong. Since all of the permanent members of the Council favoured Iraq or stayed neutral in the war, they did not disagree on any measure. Indeed, no documents indicate that any measures to stop the use of chemical weapons were discussed at all.

The use of chemical weapons was perceived as a minor problem.

One of the hypotheses was that “The conflict and also the use of chemical weapons were perceived as a minor problem in a bigger picture.” This is partly true. The overall aim of the Secretary-General was to end the war, but he realized that it would not be possible to achieve peace if he did not address the use of chemical weapons as well. The Security Council, however, paid very little attention to the issue of chemical weapons, because it was a minor problem to them. The Tanker war and the flow of oil was much more important, and the Security Council and individual actors paid much more attention to that.

Iraq was willing to negotiate, while Iran was not.

Iran had boycotted the Security Council since 1980, when the Council failed to condemn Iraq for the invasion of Iran. Iraq, on the other hand, cooperated with the Security Council and was willing to negotiate peace. By condemning Iraq for the use of chemical

weapons, the Council and the Secretary-General might have led Iraq to boycott the Council as well. Peace would then be even harder to achieve. The hypothesis “The Council did not do anything about the issue of chemical weapons, because they did not want to alienate Iraq as well” can therefore be regarded as correct.

The Iran-Iraq War showed how destructive a war can be. The war was fought for eight years, and when it ended no initial aims were achieved from either side. The war reminded the world of the cruelty and danger of chemical weapons, and states realized that they did not want to face such a threat in the future.³⁴⁷ The issue had to be addressed.

13 January 1993 the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was opened for signature in Paris. The Convention bans the development, production, use, transfer, retention or stockpiling of chemical weapons. It also requires signatories to destroy all their chemical weapons and production facilities within ten years.³⁴⁸ The Convention also established an international body, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is responsible for the implementation of the verification provisions.³⁴⁹ Even though the CWC is a limited agreement, it is still a step forward from the Geneva Protocol and a step in the right direction to prevent the use of chemical weapons.

³⁴⁷ Spiers, *A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, 66.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁴⁹ *Idem.*

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Samandrag

Denne masteroppgåva i historie tek føre seg korleis kjemiske våpen vart nytta i krigen mellom Iran og Irak 1980-1988, og korleis Tryggingrådet i FN og Generalsekretæren, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, responderte på bruken. Oppgåva tek også opp kvifor Tryggingrådet handla som dei gjorde.

Irak nytta kjemiske våpen for fyrste gong i 1983. På dåverande tidspunkt hadde Iran teke over initiativet i krigen, og hadde pressa irakiske styrker tilbake på eige territorium. Iran rapporterte om bruken til FN, men Generalsekretæren ignorerte skuldingane i tre månadar før han sende ei spesialgruppe for å undersøkje skuldingane. Gruppen bekrefta at kjemiske våpen var blitt nytta, og at Geneveprotokollen, som både Iran og Irak hadde signert, var broten for fyrste gong sidan den vart underskriven i 1929. Både Tryggingrådet og Generalsekretæren gjekk ut og fordømte bruken, men adresserte ikkje Irak som syndar, ei heller innførte dei andre tiltak for å hindre at kjemiske våpen vart nytta igjen. Iran heldt fram med å presse Irak, og sidan bruken av kjemiske våpen ikkje fekk nokon konsekvensar, utvikla Irak sitt kjemiske våpenarsenal og eskalerte bruken av det. I dei fyrste fasane var det berre militære mål som vart åtekne av gass, men i dei siste fasane vart også sivile offer. Dette må sjåast i samanheng med Tryggingrådet og Generalsekretæren sin famlande, for svake, og til tider fråverande respons.

Gangen i krigen påverka ikkje berre Irak til å byrje å nytte gass i forsvaret sitt, men det påverka også Tryggingrådet sin respons til det. Det islamske regimet i Iran hadde distansert seg frå både USA og Sovjetunionen ved ei rekkje anledningar sidan regimet kom til makta i 1979. Både stormakter, og særleg USA, støtta difor opp om Irak, både indirekte og etterkvart meir openlyst, i ei tid der verda var prega av den kalde krigen. I følge dei, ville Midtausten bli ein ustabil og fiendtleg region dersom Iran vann krigen.

Etterkvart som krigen spreidde seg til å omfatte åtak på tankarar i den Persiske Golf også, vart bruken av kjemiske våpen ei underordna sak for Tryggingrådet: for fleire av medlemsstatane var det viktigare at olje vart eksportert frå regionen. Sidan Iran vart skulda for å hindre flyten av olje, vart difor Irak sin bruk av kjemiske våpen mot Iran oversett.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Resolutions and Decisions of the Security Council 1987.

S/INF/43



RESOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL 1987



P.M. SECURITY COUNCIL

OFFICIAL RECORDS: FORTY-SECOND YEAR

UNITED NATIONS

New York, 1988

THE SITUATION BETWEEN IRAN AND IRAQ²²

Decisions

On 16 January 1987, after consultations, the President made the following statement on behalf of the members of the Council:²³

"In consultations, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the members of the Council:

"The members of the Security Council are dismayed and profoundly concerned by the fact that, in the period which has elapsed since the statement made by the President of the Council on 22 December 1986,²⁴ hostilities between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq have intensified and the risk that the armed conflict, now more than six years old, may pose a further threat to the security of the region has increased.

"The large-scale military operations which have taken place since the end of last December, and which continue at this time, and the parties' repeated allegations of serious and recurrent violations of the norms of international humanitarian law and other laws of armed conflict clearly indicate the considerable escalation in recent weeks of this conflict, which has taken the lives of countless persons, both combatants and civilians, and has caused grievous human suffering and heavy material losses. The members of the Council reiterate their serious concern over the widening of the conflict through increased attacks on purely civilian targets.

"In view of this critical situation, the members of the Council, recalling the statements made on behalf of the Council on 21 March²⁵ and 22 December 1986, again issue an urgent appeal to the parties to comply with Council resolutions 582 (1986) and 588 (1986). In this context, they appreciate the efforts made by the Secretary-General and urge him to persevere in those efforts.

"The Security Council, on which the Members of the United Nations have conferred primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, will remain seized of the situation and will continue to make every effort to bring about the cessation of hostilities and the resolution of the conflict by peaceful means in accordance with the Charter."

On 14 May 1987, after consultations, the President made the following statement on behalf of the members of the Council:²⁶

"The members of the Security Council, seized with the continuing conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq, have considered the report of the mission of specialists dispatched by the Secretary-General to investi-

gate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the conflict.²⁷

"Deeply dismayed by the unanimous conclusions of the specialists that there has been repeated use of chemical weapons against Iranian forces by Iraqi forces, that civilians in Iran also have been injured by chemical weapons, and that Iraqi military personnel have sustained injuries from chemical warfare agents, they again strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons in open violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925²⁸ in which the use of chemical weapons in war is clearly prohibited.

"Recalling the statements made by the President of the Council on 30 March 1984,²⁹ 25 April 1985³⁰ and 21 March 1986,³¹ they again emphatically demand that the provisions of the Geneva Protocol be strictly respected and observed.

"They also condemn the prolongation of the conflict which, in addition to violations of international humanitarian law, continues to exact an appalling toll of human life, to cause heavy material damage in the two States, and to endanger peace and security in the region.

"They express grave concern over the dangers of an extension of the conflict to other States in the region.

"They reiterate their call for respect for the territorial integrity of all States in the region.

"They reaffirm resolution 582 (1986) and call on both parties to co-operate with the efforts of the Security Council to open the way to an early settlement of the conflict on the basis of justice and honour.

"They express support for the Secretary-General's efforts to restore peace to the peoples of Iran and Iraq and call on both States to respond positively to his efforts."

At its 2750th meeting, on 20 July 1987, the Council decided to invite the representative of Iraq to participate, without vote, in the discussion of the item entitled "The situation between Iran and Iraq".

Resolution 598 (1987)

of 20 July 1987

The Security Council,

Reaffirming its resolution 582 (1986),

Deeply concerned that, despite its calls for a cease-fire, the conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq continues unabated, with further heavy loss of human life and material destruction,

Deploring the initiation and continuation of the conflict,

²² Resolutions or decisions on this question were also adopted by the Council in 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

²³ S/18610.

²⁴ See *Resolutions and Decisions of the Security Council, 1986*, p. 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ S/18863.

²⁷ *Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-second Year, Supplement for April, May and June 1987*, document S/18852.

²⁸ League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. XCIV (1929), No. 2138.

²⁹ See *Resolutions and Decisions of the Security Council, 1984*, p. 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1985, pp. 6 and 7.