

13. Chemical and biological security threats

Overview

In 2016 there were continued instances (alleged and confirmed) of the use of chemical weapons in the armed conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Governments continued to target Islamic State (IS) including suspected chemical weapon-related infrastructure in connection with the 2016 Mosul offensive. The United Nations Security Council remained split over whether the Syrian Government has engaged in chemical warfare.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the body that implements the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, sought to confirm the completeness and correctness of Syria's declarations partly through the work of the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and the OPCW–UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria (see section I in this chapter). The JIM issued four public reports in 2016 and concluded that an insurgent group was responsible for at least one instance of sulphur mustard use in Syria, while Syrian government forces were responsible for three instances of dispersal of chlorine. Syria and eight other states disputed the JIM's findings with respect to the use by Syrian government forces. A substantial number of other governments accepted the JIM's overall findings, while others refrained from taking a public position on the question of whether the Syrian Government had authorized the use of such weapons. The JIM's mandate was modified and extended for another year, but it remains tasked with attributing responsibility for select cases of alleged chemical weapon use.

There were further allegations of chemical weapon holdings and use in connection to the continuing fighting in Iraq (see section II). The OPCW provided analytical advice and related support to Iraq in connection with alleged chemical weapon use and to support the planned destruction of remnants of chemical weapons left over from the government of Saddam Hussein. The OPCW also carried out a maritime chemical removal operation from Libya, the second such operation (the first was from Syria in 2013–14) (see section III).

Russia's proposal to negotiate a new multilateral convention against chemical and biological terrorism at the Conference on Disarmament was met with mixed reactions (see section IV). The Eighth Review Conference to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention was held in November and agreed, subject to the outcome of a Meeting of States Parties (MSP) to be held in late 2017, a minimalistic intersessional process consisting of annual MSPs for the period 2017–20. It also agreed to extend the mandate of the Implementation

Support Unit (unless later decided otherwise) for the period 2017–21 and to continue a cooperation database established by the Seventh Review Conference.

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