

It is clear from reading UN reports that chemical weapon use was developed both in quality and in quantity by Iraq and by those who supported it. At first, attacks were against Iranian military personnel, then they were extended to civilians, and, ultimately, in the horror of Halabja, to the Iraqi people themselves.

Altogether, more than 50,000 Iranians suffered severe to moderate injuries. About 20 percent of all Iranian wounded died, and of this number 10 to 20 percent from mustard gas, 10 percent from cyanide, and the rest from nerve agents.

In recent years, there has been rapid improvement in the chemical weapons systems used against Iran. In 1984, according to US reports, delivery systems were imperfect and many bombs and shells did not explode. But UN observers noted that in 1986, no undetonated bombs could be found. Spray planes were also used in 1986 for the first time, something our government warned against at the time and many times after.

In 1987, short-range ground-to-ground missiles were used against the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the same time, UN teams dispatched to the area witnessed a new nerve agent identified as Sarin. Use of this agent reflected not only far higher toxicity, but also much more sophisticated technology needed for its production. Sarin cannot be produced with the equipment used in normal pesticide plants. In 1988, high volumes and powerful concentrations of nerve agents, particularly Sarin, were used against Iranian forces.

Why did this happen? Why, during the course of the imposed war, did no one seriously confront the extensive and intensive use of these weapons? Why did no international gathering condemn the use of mustard gas, then nerve agents, then cyanide and Sarin? Why was nothing done despite our country's repeated appeals and the treatment of hundreds of victims in hospitals in countries like the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, Sweden, the US and Britain?

Today, the situation remains critical. Despite the Paris conference held this January, further strengthening of international mechanisms to control, limit, and finally ban and outlaw all chemical warfare agents remains elusive. The permanent members of the Security Council, notwithstanding their prime responsibility for maintaining international peace, have joined the Geneva Protocol with reservations or upon conditions. But to properly uphold and strengthen the Protocol, all such reservations should be withdrawn.

In the view of the Islamic Republic of Iran, universal acceptance of the Protocol depends on providing incentives for states to join the convention, and for working out punitive measures for violations. If such measures had been applied against Iraq during the 1980s, would that country have used chemical agents against Iran? I suggest that it would not.

Fundamentally, an international climate of tolerance of Iraqi acts, coupled with its ability to procure the technology needed to produce such weapons, were decisive factors. In fact, without the encouragement of some big powers, it is doubtful that Iraq could have produced such weapons and used them on such a large scale.