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Technical Secretariat

Verification Division

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NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

REPORT ON JOINT ASSISTANCE 2005

LVIV, UKRAINE

9 – 13 OCTOBER 2005

Introduction

1. The First Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention stressed the importance of investigations into the alleged use and the threat of use of chemical weapons. It noted that, for such situations, “the OPCW must have the capacity, and be ready at all times, to investigate the need for follow-on action by the OPCW and by individual Member States, and to facilitate the delivery of assistance.” The Conference emphasised in particular the need for the OPCW “to coordinate its activities in an assistance operation with other international agencies involved in an emergency response, in particular the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs” (paragraph 7.100 of RC-1/5, dated 9 May 2003).
2. Towards the end of 2004, the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) informed Member States that an exercise on the delivery of assistance would be held in October 2005 in Ukraine. The Note indicated that the exercise would be jointly organised and conducted by Ukraine, the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO EADRCC), and the OPCW. Member States were invited to deploy assistance teams or send observers (S/454/2004, dated 16 December 2004). They were subsequently invited to participate in the first planning meeting, which was held in March 2005 in Ukraine (S/467/2005, dated 4 February 2005), in the main planning meeting, which took place in May 2005 at OPCW headquarters (S/489/2005, 8 April 2005), and in the final planning meeting, which was held in July 2005 in Lviv, Ukraine—where the exercise itself would be held (S/500/2005, 10 June 2005). Draft exercise instructions were issued to Member States in June 2005 (S/507/2005, dated 28 June 2005); final instructions, soon after that (S/511/2005, dated 29 July 2005). A revised version was issued just prior to the exercise (S/511/2005/Rev.1, dated 6 October 2005).



Participants

3. The exercise was held from 9 to 13 October 2005. It was directed by a joint team from Ukraine, NATO EARDCC, and the Secretariat. The Deputy Director-General led the Secretariat's contribution to the planning and conduct of the exercise. The team was drawn from across the Secretariat and included staff from four Divisions—the Inspectorate (INS), Verification (VER), International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA), and External Relations—and from the Office of the Legal Adviser and the Health and Safety Branch (HSB).
4. Assistance teams from 7 OPCW Member States, consisting of 169 personnel, participated in the exercise: Austria (a decontamination unit and a mobile laboratory), Estonia (a disaster-relief team with capabilities in chemical reconnaissance, search and rescue, and decontamination), France (a chemical-reconnaissance platoon from its nuclear-, biological-, and chemical-defence regiment), Iran (Islamic Republic of) (medical doctors), Poland (a mobile laboratory), Sweden (a chemical-support team with capabilities in chemical reconnaissance, search and rescue, and decontamination) and Switzerland (a special team of instructors, who attended the exercise with a number of trainees from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as part of a training course).
5. The Secretariat also fielded an inspection team of 29 personnel. The Secretariat team consisted of two subteams: one assigned to conduct the investigation of alleged use, and known as the IAU subteam, and an assistance coordination and assessment team (ACAT).
6. Seven OPCW Member States that also participate in the EADRCC deployed disaster-relief teams, comprising 160 personnel, as part of the EADRCC effort: Austria, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, and Romania.
7. Extensive Ukrainian involvement was, of course, essential to the success of the exercise. Some 220 Ukrainian personnel took part, including those working in counter-terrorism operations, in the Ukrainian National Authority, and in the local emergency-management authority. In addition, Ukraine provided approximately 250 role-players to support the exercise.
8. Seventy-four observers from 26 OPCW Member States followed the progress of the exercise from 11 to 13 October—among them the facilitator for informal consultations on issues related to Article X of the Convention. Observers saw teams from participating nations operating together in the field, and participated in seminars. In addition, on the last day of the exercise, the Ukrainian authorities organised a VIP programme, in which the Director-General of the Secretariat took part, and which included a Ukrainian anti-terrorism demonstration as well as a display of the equipment deployed by the various teams participating in Joint Assistance 2005.
9. Finally, the Secretariat fielded an evaluation team to follow the activities of its inspection team. For details, please see the section entitled “Evaluation” below.

Exercise activities the Secretariat engaged in

10. Joint Assistance 2005 was the largest exercise in which the OPCW has participated, and this was the first time that it conducted a mock investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons while working as part of an international consequence-management operation. That required the Secretariat to allocate resources accordingly.
11. Under the exercise scenario, simultaneous terrorist attacks occurred in Ukraine, some involving the apparent use of chemical weapons. Because it had to commit its own resources to responding to the attacks in the east of the country, Ukraine requested assistance from the OPCW under Article X of the Convention and from NATO EADRCC in responding to the attacks that took place in the west of the country, in the area around Lviv.
12. The activities of the various teams participating in the exercise—the Secretariat team and the international consequence-management teams fielded under Article X of the Convention and under NATO's mandate—were coordinated by officials in an on-site operations-and-coordination centre (OSOCC), which was set up by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The basic mode of operation was that the OSOCC would obtain information from the Ukrainian local emergency management authority regarding practical and logistical requirements, and would allocate tasks to the various teams at its disposal.
13. The coordinating hub for the exercise was the Yavoriv Training Centre, near Lviv. It was there that the OSOCC and the local emergency-management authority were based. The Secretariat team also established its command post at the Training Centre, and the mission leader coordinated the activities of the subteams from there. The OPCW analytical laboratory was also set up at the Training Centre.
14. As part of the exercise, the IAU subteam visited the principal site of the alleged chemical weapons attack, a facility in Sirka. The subteam's activities included the setting up of a forward command post, reconnaissance of the area and the facility, the collection of wipe and liquid samples, and decontamination. During these operations, a number of international assistance teams arrived in the area of the Sirka facility, and their activities had to be coordinated to ensure that the investigation was not impeded.
15. The IAU subteam was also requested by the OSOCC to investigate a suspected terrorist laboratory in the vicinity of the Sirka facility. In this investigation the subteam was supported by three disaster-relief teams—one each from Estonia, Latvia, and Portugal. The OPCW team's investigation included reconnaissance, the taking of samples, and decontamination. The exercise included a scenario in which team members are injured as they are taking samples, thus requiring cooperation with other teams on-site for purposes of search and rescue and medical treatment.
16. Finally, the IAU subteam was tasked with investigating two suspected munitions located in a roofless, half-demolished building near the suspected terrorist laboratory. The OPCW team was supported by a Latvian search-and-rescue team, a Dutch explosive-ordnance-disposal team, and a Portuguese ambulance team. The Dutch team assisted the OPCW team by checking the munitions (two anti-tank mines) for booby traps and moving them to a suitable position. The IAU subteam then

- conducted non-destructive evaluation (NDE), using its x-ray equipment in order to determine whether the mines had been modified to hold any chemical-warfare agent.
17. The IAU subteam included personnel who analysed a number of mock samples (actually provided by exercise-control staff) in accordance with the exercise scenario: two taken from the Sirka terrorist facility (liquid and wipe), a water sample (taken from a lake suspected of being contaminated), and a soil sample.
 18. The IAU subteam also conducted interviews of a general nature—for example, with the Head of the analysis section of the Ukrainian Security Services, which were responding to the Sirka incident, and with guards from the facility. In addition, the subteam included medical investigators, who conducted more-specialised interviews—for example, with casualties, the treating physician, and the head of the Ukrainian mobile hospital, and also had the opportunity to examine the casualties.
 19. The four-member ACAT conducted its activities in parallel with those of the IAU subteam. Two ACAT members joined OSOCC, a third served as a liaison officer between the OPCW team and the OSOCC, and the fourth as a liaison officer to the local emergency-management authority.
 20. The tasks of the ACAT personnel who joined the OSOCC included registering the international teams on-site and determining their core competencies, running the OSOCC operations desk, tasking the international teams with activities in a coordinated fashion and according to the requirements of the local emergency-management authority, and providing advice to it and the teams.
 21. In addition, the ACAT prepared an initial situation report based on data provided by the Ukrainian National Authority and on follow-up discussions. This report provided the limited information that was available at the time on the need for assistance, and was transmitted through the mission leader to OPCW headquarters, as were three subsequent reports.
 22. The exercise scenario included only limited media activity involving the OPCW: a press conference by the mission leader and the leader of the ACAT.
 23. The final exercise activity for the OPCW was a briefing by the mission leader and the leader of the ACAT to the Ukrainian National Authority on their findings. The mission leader reported that the IAU subteam's investigation of the sites to which it had been directed had concluded that chemical-warfare agent was present at both the Sirka facility and the suspected terrorist laboratory. The findings were based on the analysis of samples that had been collected at these locations. It was determined that the mines that had been found close to the terrorist laboratory were unlikely to be chemical weapons, because the NDE indicated that neither contained liquid fill. The ACAT leader explained his team's evaluation of the situation in terms of the need for assistance and of activities in support of the Ukrainian authorities in this regard.

Evaluation

24. From the early planning stages, the Secretariat considered it important to conduct a thorough evaluation of, and follow-up to, the exercise. Accordingly, a Secretariat-led evaluation team followed the entire exercise. This team consisted of five Secretariat

staff members from VER, INS, and the HSB, as well as representatives from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and from the United States of America. The results of the evaluation and the follow-up are summarised below.

25. The aim of Joint Assistance 2005, from the standpoint of the OPCW, was to test the procedures it had in place to respond to a request for assistance under Article X of the Convention and its actual ability to mount such a response. The evaluation concluded that the exercise met this aim: Almost all OPCW procedures and capabilities have been tested, and valuable lessons have been learned in all areas involved.
26. The evaluation team conducted a detailed analysis of the activities of the inspection team, and concluded that it was, by and large, able to perform the tasks expected of it. It further concluded that the targeted training provided to the inspection team in the months prior to the exercise had allowed the Secretariat to build up its capacity to a satisfactory standard. The evaluators identified a number of technical improvements that would allow the Secretariat to achieve an even higher standard. In the view of the evaluators, sustained and systematic training in investigations of alleged use and in the delivery of assistance is essential in this regard.
27. In addition to technical improvements, the exercise also brought to light several broader issues in relation to the OPCW's procedures and its capabilities both to conduct an investigation of alleged use and to deliver assistance. In particular, the evaluation team determined that the following main areas required further attention:
 - (a) the designation of a core team on which training efforts could be concentrated;
 - (b) the clarification of the ACAT's role and of how it should be staffed;
 - (c) a comprehensive evaluation of the need for training pursuant to Article X, and the preparation of a medium-term training plan;
 - (d) the need to ensure that the database on protective equipment and the list of qualified experts provide sufficiently detailed and up-to-date information;
 - (e) an evaluation of the need for equipment for investigations of alleged use;
 - (f) the development of a policy on the use of information in the context of Article X;
 - (g) media guidance for any missions undertaken pursuant to Article X;
 - (h) consideration of what reports should be prepared during an Article X mission, and a review of reporting formats; and
 - (i) an analysis of likely scenarios for investigations of alleged use, and the OPCW's potential role in these.

Follow-up

28. Based on the evaluation of the exercise, the Secretariat has prepared a detailed follow-up plan. A working group has been set up within the Secretariat, consisting of representatives of the Office of the Director-General, the Office of the Deputy

Director-General, ICA, INS, and VER. This working group will monitor the implementation of the follow-up plan and report periodically to the Director-General and senior management on progress made under it.

Conclusion

29. Joint Assistance 2005 provided the OPCW with an invaluable opportunity to test its procedures and capabilities in a complex and challenging environment. The exercise required the Secretariat to coordinate its activities with international consequence-management personnel from OPCW Member States, international organisations, and regional organisations. It served as a further reminder to the international community that the OPCW can contribute valuable specialised resources to respond to the use of chemical weapons. More generally, the exercise helped to raise the profile of the OPCW and increase understanding of its activities. The connections and contacts made during the exercise with other organisations will provide a foundation for future cooperation in areas of mutual interest.
30. For the Secretariat, Joint Assistance 2005 is the beginning of a process, not the end. The lessons learned from the exercise have been recorded and analysed. Rigorous follow-up action has begun, and mechanisms have been put in place to monitor its progress.
31. A field exercise of the scope of Joint Assistance 2005 required the investment of considerable resources, both by the Secretariat and by Member States—most particularly the host nation, Ukraine. The Secretariat acknowledges with appreciation the excellent cooperation extended by Ukraine and the other Member States that participated in the exercise, and looks forward to further cooperation.

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