

What happened in Kurdish Halabja?

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The truth of what happened in Halabja had always been hidden from the public, and many who knew exactly what happened in this Kurdish village in the second half of March 1988 disputed the western media coverage of the story.

It is a fact that key Kurdish leaders aided by the CIA and the Israeli Mossad have used a wide network of public relations companies and media outlets in the west to manipulate and twist the truth of what happened in Kurdish Halabja in 1988 in favour of the Kurdish political parties.

In 1993, an organisation was established in Israel called The Kurdish Israeli Friendship League founded by a Jewish Kurd called Moti Zaken, who originally immigrated from Zakho, Iraq, and worked closely with the American Zionist lobby in the US.

His efforts ended in 1996 in the establishment of the Washington Kurdish Institute, an organisation founded with the financial help and supervision of the Zionist Mike Amitay.

Mike Amitay is the son of Morris Amitay, a long-time legislative assistant in Congress and lobbyist for the influential American Israeli Public Affairs Committee.

Amitay junior is an adviser to Frank Gaffney's Centre for Security Policy and the former vice-chairman of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), a US-based pro-Israeli Likud advocacy outfit that specialises in connecting US military brass to their counterparts in the Israeli armed forces.

JINSA associates include Dick Cheney, John Bolton, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle. A group of Kurdish figures known for their connection with the Israeli Mossad manage the Washington Kurdish Institute. Those are: Najmaldin Karim, Omar Halmat, Birusk Tugan, Osman Baban, Asad Khailany, Kendal Nezan, Asfandiar Shukri and Mohammad Khoshnaw.

Such organisations have devoted themselves to championing the claims that the Iraqi army bombed Kurdish villages with chemical agents throughout 1988.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW) "at least 50,000 and possibly as many as 100,000 people, many of them women and children, were killed out of hand between February and September 1988, the victims being Iraqi Kurds systematically put to death in large numbers on the orders of the central government in Baghdad".

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There are other champions of the genocide claim. One is Jeffrey Goldberg, whose 18,000-word story, *The Great Terror*, in the 25 March 2002 issue of *The New Yorker* forms the basis of the US Department of State's website on alleged Iraqi genocide.

Goldberg's story is long on lurid details; we are told, for instance, that one woman, Hamida Mahmoud, died while nursing her two-year-old daughter. Goldberg also follows the Human Rights Watch formula in invoking the Nazis: "Saddam Hussein's attacks on his own citizens mark the only time since the Holocaust that poison gas has been used to exterminate women and children."

What Goldberg did not tell his readers about is that he has dual Israeli/American citizenship and served in the Israeli defence forces a few years back. Or that he purposefully ignored the War College report, which, of course, reached quite different conclusions.

The Iraqi army allegedly used chemical weapons in "40 separate attacks on Kurdish targets" during a campaign that HRW labels as genocide.

The most prominent of these purported attacks was the March 1988 "chemical assault" on the town of Halabja, in which the number of dead, according to Human Rights Watch "exceeds 5000".

It is known that both Iran and Iraq used chemical weapons in their eight-year war from September 1980 to August 1988. Most of Iraq's alleged assaults on the Kurds took place while this war was raging, although Human Rights Watch claims the attacks extended into September 1988.

Iraq has acknowledged using mustard gas against Iranian troops to overwhelm the human waves tactic used by Iranians who wanted to benefit from the fact that they outnumbered Iraqis, but has consistently denied using chemical weapons against civilians.

The only verified Kurdish civilian deaths from chemical weapons occurred in the Iraqi village of Halabja, near the Iran border, are several hundred people who died from gas poisoning in mid-March 1988.

Iran overran the village and its small Iraqi garrison on 15 March 1988. The gassing took place on 16 March and onwards; who is then responsible for the deaths - Iran or Iraq - and how large was the death toll knowing the Iranian army was in Halabja but never reported any deaths by chemicals?

The best evidence to answer this is a 1990 report by the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College. It concluded that Iran, not Iraq, was the culprit in Halabja.

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While the War College report acknowledges that Iraq used mustard gas during the Halabja hostilities, it notes that mustard gas is an incapacitating, rather than a killing agent, with a fatality rate of only 2%, so that it could not have killed the hundreds of known dead, much less the thousands of dead claimed by Human Rights Watch.

According to the War College reconstruction of events, Iran struck first taking control of the

village. The Iraqis counter-attacked using mustard gas. The Iranians then attacked again, this time using a “blood agent” – cyanogens chloride or hydrogen cyanide – and re-took the town, which Iran then held for several months.

Having control of the village and its grisly dead, Iran blamed the gas deaths on the Iraqis, and the allegations of Iraqi genocide took root via a credulous international press and, a little later, cynical promotion of the allegations for political purposes by the US state department and Senate.

Stephen Pelletiere, who was the CIA’s senior political analyst on Iraq throughout the Iran-Iraq war, closely studied evidences of “genocide in Halabja” has described his group’s findings:

“The great majority of the victims seen by reporters and other observers who attended the scene were blue in their extremities. That means that they were killed by a blood agent, probably either cyanogens chloride or hydrogen cyanide. Iraq never used and lacked any capacity to produce these chemicals. But the Iranians did deploy them. Therefore the Iranians killed the Kurds.”

Pelletiere’s report also said that international relief organisations that examined the Kurdish refugees in Turkey failed to discover any gassing victims.

After 15 years of support to the allegations of HRW, the CIA finally admitted in its report published in October 2003 that only mustard gas and a nerve agent was used by Iraq.

The CIA now seems to be fully supporting the US Army War College report of April 1990, as a cyanide-based blood agent that Iraq never had, and not mustard gas or a nerve agent, killed the Kurds who died at Halabja and which concludes that the Iranians perpetrated that attack as a media war tactic.

Despite the doubt cast by many professionals as well as the CIA’s recent report, and after years of public relations propaganda made for the Kurdish leaderships by the assistance and support of the Israeli Mossad, the issue of genocide has been marketed to the international community.

In a telephone interview with the Village Voice in 2002, Stephen Pelletiere said: “There is to this day the belief – and I’m not the only one who holds it – that things did not happen in Halabja the way Goldberg wrote it.

“And it is an especially crucial issue right now. We say Saddam is a monster, a maniac who gassed his own people, and the world should not tolerate him. But why? Because that is the last argument the US has for going to war with Iraq.”

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