



The Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD (PASCC) is run at the Center on Contemporary Studies (CCC) and sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). PASCC awards and supports strategic studies and dialogues that anticipate and try to reduce the threat of WMD capabilities.



The CCC has a respected track record for providing research and timely analysis on a variety of topics to leading decision makers in the U.S. national security community. Located in the Naval Postgraduate School, the CCC is the research wing of the Department of National Security Affairs.

Research in Progress describes ongoing PASCC research. For more information, please contact pascc@nps.edu.

Published October 2016

The Use of Chemical Weapons in Warfare: Insights from Archives and Battlefields

Performer: Georgia Tech Research Corporation

Project Lead: Lawrence Rubin

Project Cost: \$72,002

FY16–17

Objective:

There are no unclassified analyses of Iraqi decision making about chemical weapon use in the 1980s. Based on newly available documentation from Ba'athist Iraq, this project will produce the first publicly available study. The project will investigate Iraq's chemical weapons decision making in 1988 in order to produce a monograph that draws insights from the Iraq case study that are applicable to understanding Syria's recent chemical atrocities. The use of unparalleled documentation on Iraq's chemical weapon decision-making in 1988 makes this a uniquely rich case study. The project will seek to answer three research questions: First, under what conditions do leaders decide to gas domestic groups? Second, how much leverage does the United States have to deter a country from employing chemical weapons? Third, if the United States chooses not to take strong action, will this embolden the aggressor state to engage in more undesirable behavior?

Approach:

This study will use the qualitative research design of structured, focused comparisons to improve our understanding of the role that U.S. threats and assurances play, relative to other factors, in influencing decision making about chemical weapon use and non-use. To answer the research questions, this project will examine several sources: captured Iraqi records available at the Conflict Records Research Center, Hoover Institution archives, and University of Colorado Boulder archives; recently declassified interrogation reports of Iraqi principals, records, and testimony released in conjunction with the Iraqi war crimes trials; and documents in the Reagan Presidential Library, among other materials.