Opposition mounts against Reagan's nerve gas

Christopher Joyce, Washington DC

ou the atomic-bomb, says the report, which was written before confirmation of Iraq's chemical attacks against Iran's troops. Nerve gas also appears to be more useful in unpopulated areas against insurgents or unprotected troops than in a modern battlefield. Binary weapons may not prove more effective than unitary weapons, says the report.

Binary munitions are complicated, and the two chemicals may not mix properly in flight. Or if an aircraft carrying a bomb that has become activated cannot reach a target, the pilot would have to jettison the weapon before landing. Safe loading of the chemicals on the battlefield is also difficult. Nor are they as safe to handle as the US government claims—one of the two chemicals, Difluor, is as toxic as strong pesticides and would require special handling.

The report of the Congressional Research Service notes that worldwide industrialisation makes any nerve gas weapon more readily available, and concludes that US production of binary weapons would only be "marginally conducive" to what may be inevitable proliferation.

Dying serviceman tells of covert A-tests

Woomera: home for the bomb's scientists. Were there dead Aborigines in the outback?

NEW CLAIMS that Britain tested atomic bombs at Maralinga in South Australia in 1963 and that the bombs killed at least four Aborigines have created a storm of protest and renewed approaches to the British government for further information. Britain's opposition leader, Neil Kinnock, will be writing to the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, demanding further information about the alleged tests.

The claims were made by 63-year-old John Philip Burke, a former technician with the Royal Australian Air Force, who died this week of stomach cancer in an Adelaide hospital.

He said that three as yet unpublicised tests were carried out at Maralinga in May and June 1963. The tests killed birds and animals, and led to the death of four Aborigines. Burke says he found the Aborigines lying in a bomb crater after one of the detonations.

He says he was some 2-3 kilometres from two of the tests and spent three days in hospital with burns and his legs "glowing in the dark" after one of the explosions. Burke also claims that a large amount of radioactive equipment is buried at up to 20 different sites in the area.

The federal government denies that Aborigines have access to the site where radioactive equipment is buried. It says that the area is within a restricted zone monitored continuously by the police.

The minister for resources and energy, Senator Walsh, has also denied that the government has any knowledge of death or injury to Aborigines at Maralinga. He maintains that the three tests were not secret but were part of a series of "minor" trials carried out at Maralinga and Emu between 1953 and 1967. They have been mentioned in previous reports on the atomic tests.

The trials involved experiments on the effects of conventional chemical high explosives on nuclear materials, including plutonium, and with the safety of nuclear weapons in accidents. None were atomic tests but they did involve some nuclear materials.

He said the British government had confirmed that no tests or trials were carried out at Maralinga in 1963, apart from these minor trials.

However, the prime minister of South Australia, John Bannon, plans to contact both Thatcher and Kinnock to ask for further information on the tests. He says he is dissatisfied with the response of the British High Commission in Australia to requests for further information. A spokesman for Kinnock this week said that the Labour leader will take "positive steps" to find out the truth behind the allegations.

Branon has also instigated a "vigorous and exhaustive" search of all state records on the tests, although previous searches have yielded little new information.

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