NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20504

February 14, 1995

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR SAMUEL R. BERGER

THROUGH: ROBERT BELL/DANIEL PONEMAN

FROM: ELISA D. HARRIS

SUBJECT: Gulf War Interim Report

At Tab I is a memorandum for the President concerning release of the interim report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the memorandum for the President at Tab I.

Attachments
Tab I Memorandum for the President
Tab A Memo to Departments
Tab B Interim Report
Tab C Presidential and Department Statements

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 15, 1996

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

President sgd per WH
Executive Clerk FEB 15, 1996 (KR)

FROM: SAMUEL R. BERGER
JOHN H. GIBBONS
KITTY HIGGINS
MELANNE VERVEER

SUBJECT: Gulf War Interim Report

Purpose

To ask the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Health and Human Services to report back to you on their plans for implementing the recommendations in the interim report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses.

Background

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses has issued its interim report (see Tab B), as required under Executive Order 12961, of May 26, 1995. The report is a product of four full Committee hearings and three subcommittee meetings. It contains findings and recommendations in four major areas: outreach, medical and clinical issues, research and chemical and biological weapons. Much of the report focuses on policies, procedures and equipment used during the time of the Gulf War, hence there are relatively few criticisms of current Administration policies. The report is dispassionate and fair and the findings and recommendations constructive.

Findings and Recommendations

Outreach: The Committee is generally very positive about the hotlines, newsletters and other programs that have been developed by DOD and VA to educate veterans and others about Gulf War veterans' illnesses. The report contains a number of recommendations for further enhancing these programs, such as preparing a user's guide to GulfLINK, the DOD site on the Internet containing declassified documents, fact sheets and other Gulf War-related information.

Medical and Clinical Issues: The Committee concludes that DOD's policies and procedures at the time of the Gulf War did not identify health problems among some troops before they were

deployed or at the time of their demobilization. The Committee also criticizes DOD for failing to keep accurate medical records during the deployment, including on the controversial issue of the use of anti-chemical and biological warfare drugs and vaccines. These medical findings could receive particular attention in light of the ongoing deployment of U.S. troops to Bosnia. The Committee recommends a range of measures to ensure the adequacy of medical assessments and record keeping in conjunction with future troop deployments.

Research: The Committee concludes that although most of the studies on Gulf War illnesses sponsored by the Departments are well-designed, future studies would benefit from additional external scientific peer review and from input from public advisory committees and other relevant groups.

Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW): The Committee concludes that U.S. troops deployed in the Gulf lacked "real-time" biological warfare detectors and were provided with chemical warfare detectors that could not detect mustard agents and were incapable of detecting low-level exposure to chemical agents. Although not new, these findings are likely to stimulate further discussion among veterans and in the press over whether U.S. forces may have been exposed to Iraqi chemical or biological weapons. The Committee recommends that DOD give more attention to developing the necessary CBW detection capabilities and that DOD and CIA coordinate their efforts to review information about possible CBW exposure during the war.

Next Steps

The Committee will devote the next ten months to completing its review of the issues raised in the interim report and monitoring the Administration's response to its recommendations and those of previous expert groups. The Committee's final report is due by December 31, 1996. At Tab A is a memo from you to the Departments requesting that they report back to you promptly on their plans for implementing the interim report's recommendations.

Announcement of Report

In light of the fact that this is an interim report, both the White House staff and the Departments agree that the Administration should be low-key in its response to the report. At Tab C is a Presidential Statement, which is being released by the White House Press Office. Also attached are copies of the statements the Departments are issuing regarding the report.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the memo at Tab A.

Attachments
Tab A Memo to Departments
Tab B Interim Report
Tab C Presidential and Department Statements

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: Interim Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

On May 26, 1995, I established the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses to review and provide recommendations on the full range of government activities relating to Gulf War veterans' illnesses. The Committee has now released its interim report, which you have reviewed and forwarded for my attention.

I am pleased that the Committee's interim report recognizes the serious efforts underway in the Administration to respond to the health concerns of Desert Storm veterans, and I thank you for your close cooperation with the Committee as it fulfills its charge. I trust that you will continue to work closely with the Committee as it prepares its final report.

I also request that you carefully review the report's recommendations and report back to me promptly with your plans for implementing the recommendations. As I said last March when announcing my intention to establish the Advisory Committee, we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to determine the causes of the illnesses experienced by Gulf War veterans and to provide the best possible medical care to those who are ill.

February 14, 1996

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are pleased to transmit to you a copy of the interim report prepared by the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. This document is submitted in accordance with Executive Order 12961, of May 26, 1995, which established the Advisory Committee.

The interim report includes a review of U.S. Government activities in four areas that are part of the Advisory Committee's mandate: outreach, clinical care, research, and chemical and biological weapons. The report reviews the policies, procedures, and programs from Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm to the present day. The report makes a wide range of recommendations that the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs will thoroughly review during the next few weeks. The final chapter of the interim report specifies the issues that will be reviewed in the Advisory Committee's final report, which is due by December 31, 1996.

We trust that you will find this report both useful and informative.

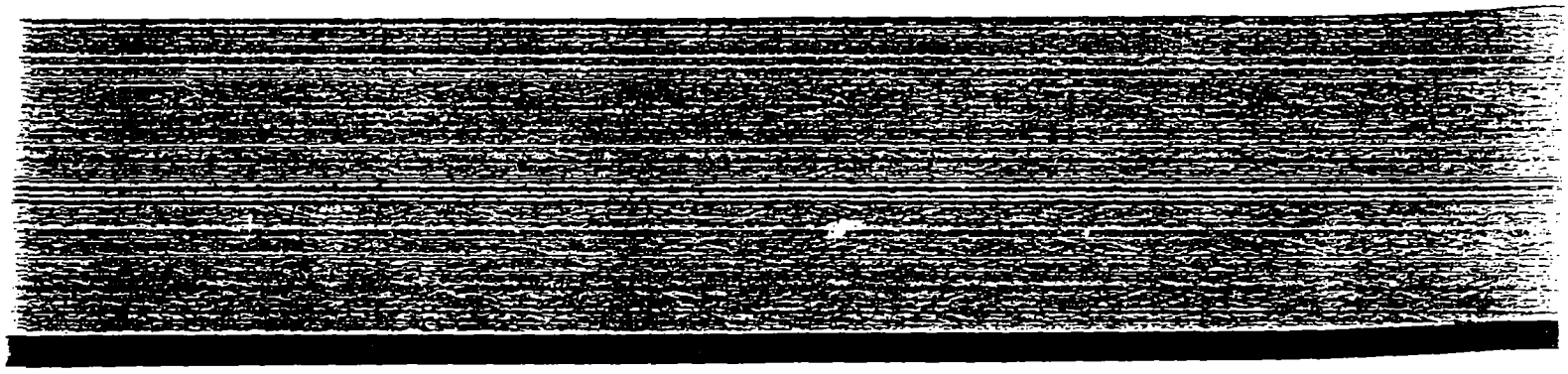
Respectfully,

WILLIAM J. PERRY
Secretary of Defense

DONNA E. SHALALA
Secretary of
Health and Human Services

JESSE BROWN
Secretary of
Veterans Affairs

Interim Report



PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES

◆

Contents

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release **February 14, 1996**

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to accept the interim report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. Dr. Joyce Lashof and the Committee members have made an impressive start on helping to ensure that we are doing all we can both to determine the causes of the illnesses Gulf War veterans are suffering from, and to provide effective medical care to those in need.

I am pleased that the Committee's interim report recognizes the serious efforts underway in the Administration to restore these men and women to good health. I know that the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs will review the recommendations contained in this report and will continue the research, outreach, and medical programs needed to improve the lives of Gulf War veterans and their families.

I have asked Secretary William Perry, Secretary Donna Shalala, and Secretary Jesse Brown to develop an action plan for implementing the recommendations in the interim report. I am also asking the Departments to continue their record of full cooperation with the Advisory Committee as it prepares its final report over the next 10 months.

As I said last March when announcing my intention to establish the Advisory Committee, 5 years ago we relied on these Gulf War veterans to fight for our country; they must now be able to rely on us to try to determine why they are ill and to help restore them to full health. We are all indebted to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses for its contribution to this critical task. I look forward to reviewing their final recommendations later this year.

# # #

Department of Defense's Response to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses -- Interim Report

The Department of Defense appreciates the effort, thought and constructive input provided by the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses in its interim report.

Like the Presidential Advisory Committee, the Department of Defense recognizes that the issues surrounding Gulf War illnesses are very complex. Since the end of the Gulf War, concerns have been raised as to whether or not there is a relationship between illnesses being experienced by some Gulf War veterans and exposures to various hazards during Gulf War service. This concern is of particular importance to our Gulf War veterans and their families. Because the Clinton Administration shares these concerns, the Department is taking unprecedented steps to help resolve the Gulf War illnesses issue and provide effective medical care for those who are ill.

The Committee's Interim Report provides a number of important findings and constructive recommendations. Most of its recommendations for the Department are either already implemented or will be implemented shortly. Consistent with the Committee's suggestions, the Department is taking the following steps:

- In 1996, we will conduct a survey to determine how well our outreach programs have worked in reaching active duty troops or retirees who served in the Gulf War.
- Our Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program Patient Satisfaction Form will ask about referral satisfaction with the Persian Gulf Medical Registry Hotline.
- We will soon release a users' guide to help the public understand the thousands of declassified documents becoming available on GULFLINK, the Department's Internet resource. The user's guide will be available on GULFLINK.
- Prior to any deployment, we will conduct a health assessment of deploying troops. A new expanded medical surveillance program (including quality control) and post-deployment followup is already operational for Joint Endeavor in Bosnia. This program will identify populations at risk, recognize and assess hazardous exposures, determine protective measures and monitor health outcomes.
- DoD will ensure all FDA requirements are met when an FDA investigational drug is used. When we use such a drug, informed consent (including a clear description and documentation of the health risks and benefits and inclusion as a part of the Service member's health record) is required unless waived by FDA.
- Should controversial and unexplained health concerns occur in the future, we have already pre-positioned hotlines and clinical programs to respond rapidly.
- We are upgrading our medical records system resulting in better records and a centralized data base that can be linked with other databases, including location of units and exposures.

- All DoD funded internal and external research related to Gulf War illnesses, including epidemiologic studies aimed at Gulf War veterans' health issues, now incorporate external scientific review and ongoing interaction with appropriate outside experts. In order to expedite some early DoD internal research, external scientific review was not always utilized.
- We will continue to encourage our research Principal Investigators to establish both scientific and public advisory committees for epidemiologic studies.
- Over the past year, the three Departments have taken steps to strengthen the Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board and have it play a stronger role in coordinating research, determining priorities for funding, and ensuring the quality of the research.
- We are collecting more and better troop exposure data as shown by our current efforts in Joint Endeavor and will have data available to health researchers.
- Our new unit locator and geographic information systems are operational and preparations are underway to make them available to qualified government and private researchers in 1996.
- We are working on better methods for detecting and identifying chemical and biological warfare agents rapidly and accurately enough to enable troops to take protective measures before being exposed.
- With the assistance of outside experts, we will continue to look at the effects of and monitoring of low-level (subacute) exposures to chemical warfare agents.

Under the direction of Secretary William Perry and Deputy Secretary John White, an unprecedented effort on Gulf War veterans' illnesses has been successfully launched. The investigation and declassification initiatives are well underway. More and more research is being funded and completed. Much medical evaluation and care has already been provided to our Gulf War veterans. The Department of Defense, in support of President Clinton's commitment to our Persian Gulf War troops and veterans, is leaving no stone unturned in the search for answers and we are leaving no soldier, sailor, marine or airman without the necessary care.

Office of Public Affairs
News Service

Washington, D.C. 20420
(202) 273-5700

Department of Veterans Affairs

News Release

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO INTERIM REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES

The Department of Veterans Affairs extends its appreciation to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses whose hard work, outstanding scientific expertise and thoughtful deliberations have combined to produce a report containing many valuable insights over a broad spectrum of issues. VA also acknowledges the important work that the Committee's interim report represents, as well as the contributions it makes toward addressing the needs and concerns of Persian Gulf War veterans and their families.

This month, as we observe the fifth anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait, we are reminded of the challenges met by Persian Gulf veterans, who accomplished their mission bravely and successfully. No less noble nor important is VA's obligation to address the needs of the veterans through medical care, compensation and research into what is causing their health problems. The Department believes VA's comprehensive programs are meeting the vast majority of those expectations. Nevertheless, the Committee's recommendations on further enhancements will ensure that VA continues to make improvements and initiate new programs in response to the needs of Persian Gulf veterans and their families.

The Committee's recommendations that were specific to this Department will be closely evaluated in the process of developing appropriate implementation plans. The following responses represent VA's preliminary assessments of the interim report's recommendations.

* VA will be improving the clarity and content of the department's communications to veterans, including public service announcements, fact sheets and newsletters, and developing performance measures for VA's Persian Gulf Helpline and outreach activities.

* VA's Veterans Health Administration has initiated discussions with the Department of Defense to develop a plan for standardized record keeping and deployment medical surveillance systems which use the latest information systems technology. Work groups are currently addressing these issues. VA's Under Secretary for Health and the Defense Department's Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs have made improvements in medical surveillance and continuity of record keeping a high priority.

* Even though VA's research is world-class, further improvements are expected in the external peer review process for these programs and in ensuring comparability among major epidemiological studies.

* Regarding the recommendations concerning the Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board, VA's Under Secretary for Health, with the Board's executive director, has taken steps to implement closer coordination by the Board's Research Working Group of research monitoring, review and strategic planning. The Working Group will monitor the findings and recommendations of scientific peer review committees and continue to play an active role in the allocation of the resources available for research on Persian Gulf veterans' illnesses.

In the coming weeks, VA will provide detailed responses to and action plans for each of the areas discussed in the Committee's interim report.

Feb. 14, 1996

HHS NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
February 13, 1996

Contact: HHS Press Office
(202) 690-6343

SECRETARY SHALALA'S STATEMENT REGARDING THE INTERIM REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES

"The Department of Health and Human Services today received the Interim Report produced by the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. The report, a Clinton Administration effort to investigate and research the activities in addressing the needs and concerns of Persian Gulf War veterans and their families, sets forth a series of recommendations. HHS is carefully reviewing these and intends to develop a plan of action for their implementation.

We commend the Presidential Advisory Committee for their efforts in evaluating the various activities undertaken by the Departments of Defense, Veterans' Affairs and Health and Human Services to determine the causes of illnesses being reported by Gulf War veterans. HHS will continue to lend support and cooperate fully with the Presidential Advisory Committee and continue our collaborative efforts with DOD and VA to respond to veterans' health concerns."

Date: 11/14/96 Time: 08:43
GPanel Says Stress Most Likely Cause of Gulf War Ailments

WASHINGTON (AP) Though investigations will continue, a presidential panel is prepared to tell President Clinton that stress most likely caused the array of unexplained illnesses afflicting thousands of Persian Gulf War veterans.

``Significant evidence supports the likelihood of a physiological stress-related origin of many of these ailments,'' the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses concludes in language agreed to by the panel Wednesday. The report, to be printed and sent to Clinton before the end of the year, also concludes that ``no single causative agent can be identified'' for the variety of ailments known collectively as Gulf War syndrome.

The panel wants the Pentagon and other government agencies to continue examining the possibility that soldiers were exposed to chemical weapons. But it heard testimony from the CIA that an intensive probe has ruled out all but one incident as a likely cause of exposure during and after the 1991 U.S.-Iraqi conflict.

Gulf War veterans have reported a variety of unexplained illnesses, such as memory loss, fatigue, diarrhea and insomnia. Some blame the ailments on exposure to Iraqi chemical weapons.

Veterans have complained that ``stress'' is merely a government code word for the notion that they are faking their illnesses, or that the problem is in their heads. Dr. Joyce Lashof, the committee chairwoman, said stress can cause real physical illness.

``We're looking at stress as the cause of physiological disease, not as something psychological,'' Lashof said.

Committee members praised the Pentagon for beefing up its investigatory effort into Gulf War illness issues. But member Arthur Caplan asked, ``Why did it take so long?''

Deputy Defense Secretary John White said the military focused on the health of its people but neglected, until new evidence surfaced this year, to revisit events during and after the Gulf conflict in its search for clues.

An intensive CIA review indicates that only a small fraction of U.S. service members deployed to the Gulf could have been exposed to chemical weapons 20,800 out of about 700,000.

``On the basis of a comprehensive review of the intelligence that we have, we continue to conclude that Iraq did not use chemical or biological weapons during the Gulf War,'' CIA Executive Director Nora Slatkin told the commission.

Of four possible chemical weapons releases, the CIA has concluded that only one could have exposed U.S. troops to hazardous agents: the March 1991 destruction of Iraqi rockets in an open pit at a site called Kamisiyah.

Incomplete military records prevented investigators from pinpointing the exact date of the demolition operation. That, in turn, prevented experts from determining the wind direction and the drift of the gas cloud.

The committee went through a long list of possible causes, such as pesticides, germ warfare agents, depleted uranium used in some conventional munitions, and smoke from oil fires, among others. In most cases, the committee concluded it is ``unlikely'' these things caused a Gulf War syndrome. In others, it sought further investigation.

The report also found it unlikely that exposures during the Gulf War caused birth defects in the children of veterans.

Pulling back from an earlier recommendation, the committee did not require the Pentagon to give up control of continuing investigations into events in the Gulf. But the committee did say

an independent group including veterans and private citizens should review the Pentagon's work.
APNP-11-14-96 0845EST