

Letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt Assessment

What Policy Should America Adopt Regarding Chemical Warfare?

It is January 1, 1944.

You are Henry Stimson, FDR's Secretary of War, a longtime politician and foreign policy spokesman. You have served your country previously as Herbert Hoover's Secretary of State, so you know the nuances of dealing with other nations and navigating public opinion. The president highly values your input and is looking to you for guidance at this most crucial time.

The U.S. has been entrenched in a brutal war for the past three years. Thousands of men have been lost and the end of the war is nowhere in sight. The Axis Powers have violated international law before, and the president is particularly concerned about the possibility of chemical warfare being used against the Allied military. Amidst concerns that Hitler was preparing to utilize poison gas, the U.S. authorized a shipment of mustard gas to the Italian war zone.

As you know, a mixture of bad luck, poor planning, and faulty execution led to the catastrophe at Bari Harbor on December 2, 1943. Although YOU have been briefed on the hundreds of casualties and the environmental concerns that followed the accidental release of mustard gas aboard the *John Harvey*, that information has remained highly classified. Our British allies have helped us to keep many of the details secret.

The Bari Incident has made President Roosevelt even more conflicted about the issue of chemical warfare. He is uncertain about his next move. Should the U.S. continue to prepare for the possibility of chemical warfare? Does the disaster at Bari show that the risk is too high? Should the U.S. continue the policy of only responding in kind to a German gas attack, or should the U.S. continue to utilize this weapon first in hopes of ending the war? Does the Geneva Protocol matter?

In a letter that is at least one page long, please advise the president on what YOU think America's policy should be regarding the use of chemical warfare. Answer the questions above. Please provide appropriate historical context and utilize (and cite!) at least four pieces of evidence from the assorted sources you utilized today.