

**Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation**  
**Note on the Publication of the United States Institute of Medicine report “Gulf War & Health: Volume 8: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War”**

**Introduction**

In the United States, the Institute of Medicine report “*Gulf War & Health: Volume 8: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War*”<sup>1</sup> was published on 9 April 2010. The report commented on the findings of the US Research Advisory Committee (RAC) report on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses which was published in November 2008. The 2008 RAC report stated that the ill health reported in Gulf veterans could be causally associated with two agents: pyridostigmine bromide (used in anti-nerve agent tablets taken by Service personnel); and organophosphate (OP) pesticides.

The RAC Committee which includes lay members, political appointees and scientific members was set up by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to provide advice and comment on Gulf veterans’ research. In December 2008, the then Secretary of the DVA sent the RAC report to the US Institute of Medicine (IOM) to “*review the advisory committee’s report before the VA officially responds to the report’s conclusions*”. This is in line with what the US authorities did with a previous RAC report in 2004.

The IOM routinely provides DVA with independent and credible reviews of published scientific research on the health of Gulf veterans. The organisation is a highly respected, non-governmental expert scientific advisory committee.

Both the RAC and IOM recognise increased reporting of symptoms in Gulf veterans, however the IOM have not been able to associate specific exposures with particular reported symptoms. Other international and UK findings do not link pyridostigmine bromide (PB) and OP pesticides with illness in Gulf veterans.

**IOM Findings**

The IOM report recognised an association between deployment to the Gulf and multi-system illness. The 2008 RAC report concluded that this illness could be caused by exposure to PB and OP pesticides. The IOM committee carefully considered this major RAC conclusion and the evidence on which it was based. Their comments were published as an annex to the main report.

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<sup>1</sup> Further details about the IOM report are available at:[www.iom.edu/Reports/2010/Gulf-War-and-Health-Volume-8-Health-Effects-of-Serving-in-the-Gulf-War.aspx](http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2010/Gulf-War-and-Health-Volume-8-Health-Effects-of-Serving-in-the-Gulf-War.aspx)

The IOM committee critically examined human exposure studies cited by the RAC as evidence that PB and OP pesticides are causally associated with Gulf illness. However, the IOM committee found that human epidemiologic evidence was not sufficient to establish a causative relationship between any specific drug or other agent, alone or in combination, and Gulf War illness. The IOM committee then examined the animal experimental studies said by the RAC to support the plausibility of the association and again found this did not meet a threshold that would support a causal link to the putative exposures.

It should be noted that the 2008 RAC report was not a systematic review of all the Gulf literature, nor of papers published since its previous report of 2004.

### **Conclusion**

It is for the United States authorities to consider taking forward any issues raised by the report. We will, of course, consider carefully any statements or comments that the DVA choose to make having assessed the report.

We note, however, that the IOM report mirrors the findings of the Medical Research Council (MRC) review of research into UK Gulf veterans' illnesses published in 2003. In particular, the MRC review recommended giving priority to research aimed at improving the long term health of Gulf veterans with persistent symptoms. A contract for research into ways of rehabilitating Gulf veterans has been awarded to Cardiff University and the project is ongoing.

We further note that the IOM report supports the international majority view and MOD's long standing position that PB and OP pesticides are not the cause of ill-health reported in some Gulf veterans.

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