

Why Saddam Didn't Come Clean

By Col. Dan Smith (Ret.) | October 2, 2003

Information emerging from the intelligence community indicates that the Iraq Survey Team looking for Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq is coming up empty.

Although the so-called "progress report" is still be written, CIA spokesperson Bill Harlow conceded that former UN inspector David Kay will be unable to "rule anything in or out" despite four months of intensive searching by his 1,400-strong survey group. This hedge moves the U.S. position closer to that of Dr. Hans Blix, whose UN Monitoring and Verification Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) found no weapons during its four months of inspections in 2002-2003. In fact, Blix now believes that Saddam probably destroyed his WMD stocks shortly after the end of the first Gulf War in 1991 (BBC, September 18).

Yet the White House continues to try to keep alive the idea that Saddam had these weapons, was intent on using them, and thus posed an "imminent threat" to the United States. Last October, unclassified portions of a National Intelligence Estimate stated that "Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons" and "if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade." As recently as September 14th on *Meet the Press*, Vice President Cheney referred to "mobile biological facilities that can be used to produce anthrax or smallpox or whatever else you wanted..." On September 22nd, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice stated that when the shooting started March 20th, "nobody who knew anything about Iraq believed that Saddam Hussein had destroyed all of his weapons of mass destruction." The next day before the UN General Assembly, President Bush asserted: "The regime of Saddam Hussein cultivated ties to terror while it built weapons of mass destruction. It used those weapons in acts of mass murder and refused to account for them when confronted by the world."

While the Vice President's statement has been undercut by technical weapons experts in both the U.S. and UK, Rice's observation is accurate, as is the

President's point about mass murder and the lack of accountability. Unfortunately, no one seems interested in trying to understand why the Iraqis resisted disclosure of what happened to their WMD—after all, UN inspectors had found documents describing quantities of chemicals and "bugs" produced in the 1980s—or why everyone was fooled into the belief that Saddam still had weapons in 2002-2003.

The most probable reason why Saddam didn't "come clean" with the world about his holdings of chemical and biological weapons was his reluctance to reveal the extent of Iraq's military weakness after the 1991 Gulf War.

Consider the facts and the psychology.

- The Persian Gulf is a rough neighborhood, much of it due to Saddam's war against Iran (1980-88) and the first Gulf War.
- By comparison with Iraq, Iran is a powerhouse. Its population is double Iraq's. Its regular military and Revolutionary Guards were more potent forces than Iraq's military, which had been under fire since the Gulf War and which was starved of new equipment and repair parts.
- Many of the clerics who, in the 1980 when Saddam attacked, were trying to re-energize and redirect a post-Shah Iran were in positions of power in Iran in the 1990s. Saddam may have reasoned in a classic "mirror-image" fashion that if the Iranians knew the full extent of Iraq's military weakness, they might seek revenge by attacking Iraq.

Saddam's Trump Card

Saddam's trump card was the world's (and especially western) knowledge that he had possessed and used chemical weapons and that he had had a biological



Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF)

www.fpi.org
A Think Tank Without Walls

and nuclear weapons development program. All he had to do was ensure no one outside a tight inner circle found out that Iraq had no remaining weapons or materials that inspectors could uncover. (After all, as long as he had the scientists and the knowledge base, he could restart the programs when the inspectors left.)

Key to making this grand deception work was destroying any paper trail about weapons numbers and disposition. The absence of paperwork would itself send up a big red flag for UN inspectors and intelligence analysts worldwide who knew that everything in Iraq was always meticulously documented. If successful, the end result would be inertia; the absence of contradictory information would induce intelligence analysts to maintain their presumption that Saddam still had weapons. And in this inertia lay the greatest chance that Saddam could outlast the West and, once again, come out a survivor.

What Saddam hadn't foreseen was that the man who ran the special weapons program, his son-in-law General Hussein Kamel, would defect to Jordan and talk. But when he told CIA and UN interrogators that he had ordered the destruction of all stocks of chemical and biological weapons and agents, Hussein Kamel's statements were discounted. And undoubtedly to prevent continued interrogations during which some bright intelligence analyst might begin to believe the destruction of weapons actually happened,

Saddam lured his son-in-law back to Baghdad—where he was killed.

Why did Saddam's ploy work? Because western analysts succumbed to their own mirror imaging. The only possible motive they could imagine that explained why Saddam would endure harsh UN sanctions and scores of foreigners running around his country was that he had something to hide. He could also appeal to Iraqi nationalism by blaming outsiders for the ills in Iraqi society.

The moral is simple. If one believes in witches and warlocks, one will be able to find evidence they exist and eventually the actual beings. The administration and the world believed Saddam had weapons, and he obliged by dropping hints and acting as if he were hiding something. The White House "saw" these hints and actions as the equivalent of the real thing and went to war.

Now the issue is not WMD but the U.S. presence in Iraq, which the administration calls "liberation." What counts more is what the Iraqis call this presence, what they see, and what they believe.

(Dan Smith <dan@fcnl.org> is a military affairs analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at www.fpif.org) is a retired U.S. army colonel and Senior Fellow on Military Affairs at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.)

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at www.irc-online.org) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at www.ips-dc.org). ©2003. All rights reserved.

Foreign Policy In Focus

"A Think Tank Without Walls"

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to "making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner." For more information, visit www.fpif.org.

Recommended citation:

Dan Smith, "Why Saddam Didn't Come Clean," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, October 2, 2003).

Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2003/0310clean.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Dan Smith

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

p. 2

www.fpif.org

A Think Tank Without Walls

