

Kurds know nothing of “terrorist poison factory” cited by Powell

Kate Randall
8 February 2003

Secretary of State Colin Powell devoted a considerable part of his speech to the United Nations on Wednesday arguing that the Iraqi regime has direct ties to the Al Qaeda terrorists, and that these connections pose an imminent threat to world peace and the safety of the American public.

One of Powell’s key arguments was the alleged existence of a poison and explosives training center camp located in northeastern Iraq, where he claimed the Ansar al-Islam terrorist network operating under Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, a close associate of Osama bin Laden, “is teaching its operatives how to produce ricin and other poisons.” As Powell spoke, a large monitor displayed a photograph with the caption: “Terrorist Poison and Explosives Factory, Khurmal.”

An article appearing in the *New York Times* the day after the secretary of state’s speech, headlined “Kurds Puzzled by Report of Terror Camp,” completely undercuts Powell’s allegation. The *Times* quotes a senior Kurdish official identified as a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, familiar with intelligence on Ansar al-Islam, who commented, “I don’t know anything about this compound.”

The *Times* continues, “Kurds also questioned whether Mr. Powell was mistaken, or had mislabeled the photograph. Khurmal, the village named on the photo, is controlled not by Ansar al-Islam but by Komala Islami Kurdistan, a more moderate Islamic group.”

What is particularly curious is the fact that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan—which is allied with an American intelligence team in northern Iraq—maintains relations with Komala Islami Kurdistan. Furthermore, according to the *Times*, the Patriotic Union has been paying \$200,000 to \$300,000 a month in aid to Komala.

There are two possible explanations for this

astonishing report. First, if Secretary Powell is to be taken at his word that the camp in Khurmal is manufacturing poisons, then the US and the de facto Kurdish government in northern Iraq are directly implicated in the production of these poisonous agents.

The second—and more likely—explanation is that the entire story of the terrorist camp is a lie. In either event, it demonstrates that no credibility can be given to the entire shoddy edifice of allegations and lies that constitutes Powell’s brief for war against Iraq.

At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Thursday, senators were given little information when they pressed Secretary Powell for answers about the alleged poison-producing camp. Senator Joseph Biden, Jr. (D-Del.) asked, “Why have we not taken it out? Why have we let it sit there if it’s such a dangerous plant producing these toxins?”

Powell said he was not at liberty to discuss the matter in open session. It is obvious, however, that if the Bush administration considered the Khurmal plant a terrorist threat, it would have had ample opportunity to strike it, with US intelligence agents operating among the Kurdish population nearby and US and British war planes patrolling much of northern Iraq in the adjacent “no-fly” zone. In light of the charge that the plant is producing lethal poisons, Powell and other Bush administration officials have given no credible explanation for their behavior.

A State Department press officer contacted by the WSWWS claimed to have no knowledge of the *New York Times* article or the evident contradiction between the information in Colin Powell’s presentation on the Khurmal camp and statements by Kurdish officials in northern Iraq.

Not surprisingly, the next-day refutation of one of Powell’s principal claims has received virtually no

coverage in the US media, which has unanimously signed on in support of Bush's war drive.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact