

Transcript of interview with Iraqi defector exposes White House lies on Iraqi weapons

Peter Symonds
4 March 2003

A small article appeared last week in the US magazine *Newsweek* that effectively demolishes one of the Bush administration's central accusations against Baghdad: that it has failed to account for large stockpiles of so-called weapons of mass destruction (WMD) allegedly produced in the early 1990s.

UN inspection teams have scoured Iraq for more than two months and unearthed nothing. As a result, unsubstantiated US claims about Iraq's hidden weapons have assumed ever-greater importance as a pretext for war. Every attempt by Baghdad to comply with UN resolution 1441 is greeted with scornful replies from Washington of "too little, too late" and denunciations of Iraq's "pattern of lies and deception". The only evidence offered by the US for the continued existence of stores of chemical, biological and other weapons has been the undisclosed testimony of various Iraqi defectors.

But what the low-key article in *Newsweek* revealed was that the Bush administration has been blatantly lying about the evidence provided by their chief witness—Hussein Kamel, son-in-law of Saddam Hussein, who was head of Iraq's military industrial commission and managed the country's weapons programs. Kamel fled to Jordan in 1995 where he was interviewed in depth by the CIA, British intelligence and UNSCOM weapons inspectors and provided details of Iraq's weapons research and production. In 1996 he returned to Iraq where he was murdered.

Kamel provided extensive information on Iraq's chemical, biological, nuclear and missile research and developments programs in the 1980s—prior to the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War. A 1999 UNSCOM letter to the UN Security Council explained the significance of the interviews by stating that its entire work "must be divided into two parts, separated by the events following the departure from Iraq, in August 1995, of Lt. Gen. Hussein Kamel."

What *Newsweek* revealed, however, was that Kamel had told his interviewers that "after the Gulf war, Iraq destroyed all its chemical and biological weapons stocks and the missiles to deliver them." All that was retained were research details—blueprints, computer disks and microfiches—and the molds for missile warheads. In other words, Kamel's remarks reveal the opposite of what the Bush administration alleges.

The magazine claims that Kamel's statements were "hushed up" at the time in order to allow UN inspectors to bluff Hussein into providing more information. Even if that were the case, their continued suppression, more than eight years later, is a case of outright deception. Washington continues to cite Kamel as "proof" that Iraq has not destroyed its weapons stockpiles.

In a speech last October, President Bush declared: "In 1995, after several years of deceit by the Iraqi regime, the head of Iraq's military industries defected. It was then that the regime was forced to admit that it had produced more than 30,000 litres of anthrax and other deadly biological agents. The inspectors, however, concluded that Iraq has likely produced two to four times that amount. This is a massive stockpile of biological weapons that has never been accounted for, and capable of killing millions."

US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in his speech last month to the UN Security Council on the case for war, claimed: "It took years for Iraq to finally admit that it had produced four tons of the deadly nerve agent, VX. A single drop of VX on the skin will kill in minutes. Four tons. The admission only came out after inspectors collected documentation as a result of the defection of Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's late son-in-law."

Predictably, Washington and London reacted to the *Newsweek* revelation with denials and more lies. Complaining that the magazine had failed to check with the CIA prior to publication, its spokesman Bill Harlow bluntly asserted: "It is incorrect, bogus, wrong, untrue." A British government source told Reuters: "We've checked back and he [Kamel] didn't say this. He said the opposite, that the WMD program was alive and kicking."

Within days, however, a full transcript of the 1995 interview between Kamel and UNSCOM officials—the basis for the *Newsweek* story—appeared on the Internet [<http://www.casi.org.uk/info/unscom950822.pdf>]. It was made available by Cambridge University academic Glen Rangwala, who previously revealed that Blair's "intelligence dossier" had been plagiarised from a dated student thesis.

The transcript, which was marked "sensitive," completely confirmed the original story. In a three-hour discussion, Kamel methodically answered questions from former UNSCOM

chairman Rolf Ekeus, senior UNSCOM inspector Nikita Smidovich and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) deputy director Professor Maurizio Zifferero on Iraq's weapons programs.

Questioned on Iraq's research into various biological weapons, the following exchange took place:

Kamel: Yes, but I did not recall medical names. However, the main focus was on anthrax and a lot of studies were done.

Smidovich: Were weapons and agents destroyed?

Kamel: Nothing remained.

Smidovich: Was it before or after the inspections started?

Kamel: After visits of inspection teams. You have important role in Iraq with this. You should not underestimate yourself. You are very effective in Iraq.

Kamel provided details of Iraq's nuclear research into uranium enrichment but pointed out that "in the nuclear area, there were no weapons." In the course of the discussion, IAEA official Zifferero himself declared: "Original Iraqi documents indicated that the program had been terminated in January 1991 due to damage by coalition raids."

He went on to explain that all 819 long-range missiles, together with nine of the 11 launchers, purchased from the former Soviet Union had been destroyed.

Kamel was questioned extensively on Iraq's production of chemical weapons. Asked about VX, the agent referred to by Powell, he explained that Iraq had "put it in bombs during the last days of the Iran-Iraq war. They were not used and the program was terminated."

Kamel also pointed to US involvement in Iraq's chemical weapons program in the 1980s when Washington was supporting Iraq in its war against Iran. "Some of the chemical components came from the US to Iraq," he said. After the Iran-Iraq war, the factories used to make chemical weapons were turned over to the production of medicines, pesticides and insecticides.

He made clear that Iraq had not produced chemical weapons during the 1990-91 Gulf War out of fear of massive retaliation by the US. "We gave instruction not to produce chemical weapons. I don't remember [the] resumption of chemical weapon production before the Gulf war. Maybe it was only minimal production and filling. But there was no decision to use chemical weapons for fear of retaliation. They realised that if chemical weapons were used, retaliation would be nuclear."

He concluded by emphatically declaring: "I ordered the destruction of all chemical weapons—biological, chemical, missile nuclear were destroyed."

The transcript conclusively refutes claims that *Newsweek* simply got it wrong. Moreover, it demonstrates that Bush, Powell and other White House officials have consistently lied about what Kamel's defection revealed and, with the complicity of UN weapons inspectors, have ensured that his comments remained secret.

A subservient media has all but ignored the issue. The

Newsweek article last week was a six-paragraph story buried away in its Periscope section. The scant coverage that has appeared since has all been aimed at belittling the significance of Kamel's statements and attacking his reliability.

The British-based *Guardian*, for instance, described the transcript of the interrogation as "inconclusive and often misleading" without citing any passages or explaining why. It highlighted the comments of Rolf Ekeus who branded Kamel "a consummate liar". According to the article, Ekeus conceded that Iraq had "probably eliminated" its biological arsenal but remained convinced that it had the means to reconstitute it. No evidence was offered.

Ekeus's comment smacks of a knee-jerk reaction from someone who has been caught out covering up crucial information. At any rate, Ekeus cannot have it both ways: Kamel cannot be both "a consummate liar" and a prime witness at the same time. If his testimony was a pack of lies, it simply demonstrates that Bush, Powell and others have been basing themselves on false information all along.

It is more likely, however, that Kamel was telling the truth. As *Newsweek* commented, the interview was "a gold mine of information. He had a good memory and, piece by piece, he laid out the main personnel, sites and progress of each WMD program." A military aide who defected with Kamel filled in the technical data and confirmed Kamel's statement that Iraq's stockpiles had been destroyed. Ekeus is quoted in the article as saying the information was "almost embarrassing, it was so extensive."

The record shows that it is the Bush administration, rather than Iraq, that has been engaged in a pattern of lies and deception. It has systematically covered up and lied about the evidence provided by one of its prime witnesses. When the *Newsweek* article appeared, the CIA denounced it as false. When the original transcript was produced, the Bush administration remained silent, relying on a compliant media to bury the truth.

The entire episode is one more demonstration that Washington's plans to invade Iraq have nothing to do with weapons of mass destruction. They are aimed at furthering Washington's strategic and economic interests in Iraq and the region as a whole.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact