

WMD report: more proof Iraq war was based on lies

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The interim report delivered by Washington's handpicked chief weapons inspector has confirmed yet again that the Bush administration's war against Iraq was an unprovoked act of aggression that was based on lies.

The report was largely anti-climactic, confirming what has already become all too obvious: there exists no evidence that the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or posed any threat whatsoever to the US or the rest of the world.

"We have not found at this point actual weapons," David Kay said in his report to Congress. "It does not mean we've concluded there are no actual weapons."

This conclusion follows three months of work and \$300 million in expenditures by Kay's 1,200-member Iraq Survey Group (ISG), composed of military and civilian experts. Their efforts came on top of those performed by military personnel organized in the search teams of the 75th Exploitation Task Force that roamed the country in the aftermath of the US invasion, not to mention the intrusive inspections regime imposed under the mantle of the United Nations before the war.

Hans Blix, the UN's chief weapons inspector, dismissed Kay's report. "I don't think there are any surprises," he said. "The most important point is that they confirm that they have not found any stocks of weapons of mass destruction of any kind. They found minor proscribed items and debris." Blix last month compared the US claims about Iraqi WMD to the hunt for witches during the Middle Ages.

Kay's report served up a damning refutation of each specific point cited by the Bush administration in the run-up to the war as justifications for invading Iraq.

Related to the most sensational charge, the incessant claim that the continued existence of the Hussein regime threatened the US with a nuclear terrorist attack, Kay reported: "To date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material."

In an Oct. 7, 2002, speech delivered in Cincinnati, Bush had declared that "the evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program... Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."

Similarly, Vice President Cheney, in a March 16 appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press," had declared of Saddam Hussein, "We know he has been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons. And we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons."

The ISG report merely confirms the assessment made by Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the UN nuclear inspection team, who said that

the US had used forged and false evidence to manufacture its nuclear weapons claims.

The ISG report also concluded that whatever chemical weapons (CW) program Iraq maintained was apparently abandoned long before the US invasion.

A National Intelligence Estimate prepared last October warned that the Iraqi regime had renewed production of mustard, sarin and VX agents, and "probably has stocked" 100 to 500 tons of chemical weaponry, "much of it added in the past year."

But Kay told the congressional intelligence committee: "Multiple sources with varied access and reliability have told ISG that Iraq did not have a large, ongoing, centrally controlled CW program after 1991."

He added: "Information found to date suggests that Iraq's large-scale capability to develop, produce and fill new [chemical] munitions was reduced—if not entirely destroyed—during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Fox, 13 years of UN sanctions and UN inspections," Kay said.

This assessment stands as an indictment not only of the claims made by the Bush administration in launching the war last March, but also of the trumped-up WMD charges made by the Clinton White House in 1998 before launching cruise missile attacks on Baghdad.

The sole physical evidence of WMD material that the 1,200-person army of US inspectors could claim to have found was a single vial of botulinum in the home of an Iraqi scientist. In the run-up to the war, US officials claimed ominously that Iraq had stockpiled 38,000 liters of the toxin. The report also claimed that the ISG had discovered equipment and elements of laboratories as well as the ashes of burned documents, the material that Blix referred to as "minor proscribed items and debris."

As to the tons of anthrax, ricin, mustard gas, VX and other deadly substances that Washington maintained were present in Iraq, the ISG has found not a trace.

The ISG report further suggested that the only piece of WMD-related equipment that the Bush administration claimed to have located in the aftermath of the war was also bogus.

"We have not yet been able to corroborate the existence of a mobile BW [biological weapons] production effort," Kay told a congressional hearing Thursday. The administration had claimed that a pair of flatbed trucks equipped with cooling equipment and fermenters that US forces recovered in May were mobile weapons labs.

Iraqi scientists countered that the trucks were used for making hydrogen for weather balloons. US military officials quoted by the Associated Press indicated that the Pentagon has accepted this explanation. No trace of biological materials was found on either

vehicle.

After the report's release, Bush declared that it proved "Saddam Hussein was a danger to the world." British foreign secretary Jack Straw echoed this claim, stating that the ISG's findings showed "how dangerous and deceitful the regime was and how the military action was indeed both justified and essential to remove the dangers."

In reality, the report only confirmed the claims of the Iraqi regime itself and the assessment of most independent observers: Iraq had destroyed its WMD stocks and was effectively disarmed well before the war was launched.

Kay's report to Congress came on the heels of findings by US military intelligence that virtually all claims made by Iraqi exiles concerning supposed secret weapons programs had proven fraudulent.

Officials within the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) leaked the findings of a secret report, which also said that leads from Iraqi defectors had proven fruitless. The agency concluded that the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the Iraqi exile group that arranged for most of the defectors to speak to intelligence analysts, promoted the stories in a bid to provoke a US invasion, while the defectors themselves were currying Washington's favor in hopes of being resettled in the US.

The US government paid more than \$1 million for the useless information. The *New York Times* reported Sept. 29 that officials who leaked the DIA findings "would not speculate on whether the defectors had knowingly provided false information and, if so, what their motivation might have been." The *Times* report added: "One Defense Department official said that some of the people were not who they said they were and that the money for the program could have been better spent."

The "intelligence" provided by the INC-sponsored defectors was championed by the right-wing ideologues in the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, and promoted by the *Times* itself through the reports of its senior correspondent Judith Miller. She acknowledged in an internal memo at the newspaper that nearly all of her WMD "exclusives" were based on information provided by the INC's chief, Ahmed Chalabi.

The leaking of the DIA report is one more indication of the deep and bitter divisions within the national security establishment that have emerged in response to the growing debacle for the US military occupation in Iraq.

The substance of the Kay report is itself testimony to these divisions. If there were ever an individual who could be counted upon to manufacture the "evidence" that the Bush administration desires, it is David Kay.

A right-wing Republican, Kay was a political official at the Pentagon under the Reagan administration in the 1980s. In 1991, in the wake of the Persian Gulf War, the first Bush administration managed to have him installed as the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency nuclear weapons inspection team in Iraq.

He was removed from this UN agency in 1992 after a series of provocations and because of his unconcealed and intimate ties with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Documents that he unearthed purporting to reveal the existence of an ongoing Iraqi nuclear program later proved to be forgeries.

In the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, Kay was a ubiquitous presence on the cable news networks promoting the Bush administration's program of "regime change."

Before rejoining the CIA, Kay was senior vice president for San Diego-based Science Applications International Corp. (SAIC), a

major defense contractor that has won lucrative contracts both for homeland security and Iraqi reconstruction. Kay reportedly retains a major interest in the company in terms of stock ownership.

If such an individual was unable to produce the kind of report that would have bolstered the Bush administration's WMD claims, it is undoubtedly because there are elements within the US military and the intelligence establishment who are refusing to collaborate in lying to the American public.

The Bush administration has asked for a secret appropriation of another \$620 million to fund the continuation of the ISG's fruitless hunt for WMD. The obvious question is whether this money will be used in another elaborate attempt to fabricate evidence where none exists.

Kay's report promoted fresh charges that the administration deliberately promoted phony intelligence to further its longstanding aim to conquer Iraq.

Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV of West Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said that the report contradicted claims made before the war that Iraq had posed an imminent danger.

"Did we misread it or did they mislead us, or did [we] simply get it wrong?" he asked. "Whatever the answer is, it's not a good answer."

There is only one politically credible conclusion, but the Democrats are too cowardly to publicly state it. The Bush administration deliberately manufactured intelligence suggesting a threat from Iraq in order to overcome mass opposition to launching a war of aggression.

The Iraqi people have paid for this crime with the deaths and maiming of tens of thousands of people, while American soldiers are being killed on a daily basis as the result of growing resistance to an illegal colonial occupation. The hundreds of billions of dollars that are going to fund the occupation and the profiteering by politically connected firms like Halliburton and Bechtel will be paid for by American working people through attacks on living standards, social programs and jobs.

The report from the ISG—confirming in unmistakable terms that the Bush administration lied to the American people about the reasons for war—poses the urgent need for an independent investigation leading to the impeachment and criminal prosecution of all those responsible for provoking this war. The call for such a probe must be advanced together with the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq.



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