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Weapons of Mass Delusion

by Jennifer A. Gritt

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President Bush told the world that Saddam's alleged WMDs directly threatened the U.S. Now that the war is over and no arsenal was found, where does that leave America?

Months before the horror of 9-11, Secretary of State Colin Powell defended a recent air strike against Iraq during a press conference in Cairo, Egypt. On February 24, 2001, Powell stated unequivocally: "The message I plan to give to all the leaders I speak to and to the Arab public is that the cause of this problem that we have [in the Middle East] is in Baghdad. It is Saddam Hussein who refuses to abandon his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations has an obligation and, as a part of the United Nations, the United States has an obligation to do everything we can to cause him to come into compliance with the agreements he made at the end of the Gulf War. *He threatens not the United States*. He threatens this region. He threatens Arab people.... He has used them before, so I think we all have a solemn obligation to keep him in check." (Emphasis added.)

As shocked Americans tried to come to grips with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, certain members of the neoconservative establishment tried to blame the atrocity on Saddam. All evidence, however, pointed to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network, with no link between the Saudi rich kid fanatic and the Iraqi dictator to be found. After the brief distraction of the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan – which was supposed to accomplish the destruction or capture of Osama bin Laden but ended with the removal of the ruling Taliban instead – the Bush administration turned its sights back towards Baghdad.

In order to convince both Americans and the global community that war on Iraq was justified, however, the Bush administration first had to prove that Iraq had an arsenal of weapons that could threaten not only the American homeland but the entire world. While no solid proof was ever found, the Bush administration continued to state over and over that Saddam's supposed WMDs were a dire threat to America. "I will not leave the American people at the mercy of the Iraqi dictator and his weapons," President Bush declared during a March 6th press conference. And because Saddam was such a threat to America, the U.S. must invade Iraq – in order to enforce UN resolutions – despite this being an obvious contradiction to Powell's previous statement.

But now that war in Iraq has come to its inevitable conclusion of a U.S.

military victory, one glaring question remains unanswered. Where is Saddam's arsenal of WMDs?

U.S. Pushes For War

During his January 28th state of the union address, President Bush declared: "Today, the greatest danger in the war on terror, the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. These regimes could use such weapons for blackmail, terror, and mass murder. They could also give or sell those weapons to terrorist allies, who could use them without the least hesitation."

In order for Iraq to be a possible supplier of WMDs to terrorists, Saddam first had to possess the weapons. After Gulf War I, the UN Security Council passed a resolution stating that Saddam must fully disarm and never again pursue development of WMDs. As a means to enforce the resolution, the international body imposed economic sanctions on Iraq and established what is known as the "oil for food" program in order to alleviate the devastation sanctions had on the Iraqi civilian population. In addition, British and American fighter jets have continually bombed strategic locations within the "no-fly zone" in southern Iraq. So despite the economic dilapidation resulting from sanctions and the continual U.S. and British military presence in the south, the Bush administration was convinced that Iraq was re-arming to such an extent that Saddam had become a threat to the entire world.

In October 2002, the Central Intelligence Agency released a report entitled "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs." In it, the CIA declared: "Iraq has continued its weapons of mass (WMD) programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions; if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade." According to the CIA, through illicit oil sales, Iraq has increased its ability to build WMDs. The report stated that "Iraq largely has rebuilt missile and biological weapons facilities," that were damaged in Gulf War I, and "has expanded its chemical and biological infrastructure under the cover of civilian production."

More importantly, "Baghdad has begun renewed production of chemical warfare agents, probably including mustard, sarin, cyclosarin, and VX," and "All key aspects ... of Iraq's offensive BW program are active and most elements are larger and more advanced than they were before the Gulf war." In addition, "Iraq maintains a small missile force and several development programs, including for a UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] that most analysts believe probably is intended to deliver biological warfare agents." If this CIA report was correct, then Saddam should have been able to produce and stockpile an array of WMDs in the last four years.

Crying Wolf

As a 2002 CIA report on the "Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions"

documents, out of all the high-risk nations seeking to acquire WMDs, Iraq ranked second to last in the procurement of materials and technology. Sudan, which never had a documented weapons programs, ranked last. The other nations listed were Iran, North Korea, Libya, Syria, India, and Pakistan with every single one of them having a greater risk assessment than Iraq. While these nations had documentable advancements in their weapons programs – with Iran being listed as already having the "technology that also can support fissile material production for Tehran's overall nuclear weapons program" – the language used to describe Saddam's alleged arsenal was ambiguous at best.

After making a reference to Iraq's concealment efforts after UN inspectors were kicked out in 1998, the report goes on to state: "More than ten years of sanctions and the loss of much of Iraq's physical nuclear infrastructure under IAEA oversight have not diminished Saddam's *interest* in acquiring or developing nuclear weapons." (Emphasis added.) In addition, the CIA believed that, "since December 1998, Iraq has increased its capability to pursue chemical warfare (CW) programs," based on evidence that Iraq had bolstered its "dual-use" facilities. While the nuclear threat is by far the greater danger when it comes to WMDs, the CIA concluded that "Baghdad could produce a nuclear weapon within a year if it were able to procure weapons-grade fissile material abroad." So unlike neighboring Iran, which already had such materials through cooperative efforts with Russia, Iraq was nowhere near having the capability to produce a nuclear bomb.

The CIA stressed that the only way Iraq could even begin a nuclear weapons program was if it obtained the necessary materials from a foreign source. On this point, the CIA report documented that, of the three recognized "supplier" nations, Russia and China were greatly responsible for the advancements in weapons programs in all of the high-risk nations listed. As the General Accounting Office stressed in their report "Weapons of Mass Destruction: Observations on U.S. Threat Reduction and Nonproliferation Programs in Russia," when the Soviet empire collapsed in 1991, "Russia inherited the world's largest arsenal of weapons of mass destruction..." The problem, however, is that according to the GAO, the U.S. has only been able to assist in the protection of "32 percent of Russia's weapons-usable nuclear material." That means that, of the 68 percent left over, the U.S. has no idea whether the materials are being sold to high-risk nations and terrorist networks, or if it is vulnerable to theft.

The GAO report went on to stress that one of the problems in securing the Soviet arsenal stems from Russia refusing access to certain WMD sites. "As a result, the [U.S.] agencies have been unable to help protect substantial portions of Russia's nuclear warheads and weapons-usable material." In light of this information, it would appear that if America is to be concerned about the possible proliferation of WMDs, that it would do better to focus on the "supplier" nations – Russia being the most significant. More importantly, while nuclear bombs could be delivered from a greater distance, in order for the more unconventional weapons – chemical, biological, and radiological (dirty bombs) – to be a threat to the U.S., they would have to be smuggled into our country. So again, if America was really serious about protecting citizens from these weapons, a greater emphasis should be put on securing our borders and tightening our immigration policies.

Enforcing UN Resolutions

In response to growing concern over Saddam's alleged re-armament, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1441. The resolution was designed to force Iraq to allow UN inspectors back into the country to ensure that Saddam was complying with all previous UN resolutions. Inspectors were allowed back in, and under the leadership of Chief UN Inspector Hans Blix, the UN teams found very little.

In his January 27th report to the Security Council, Blix emphasized: "In the past two months during which we have built-up our presence in Iraq, we have conducted about 300 inspections to more than 230 different sites. Of these, more than 20 were sites that had not been inspected before. By the end of December, UNMOVIC began using helicopters both for the transport of inspectors and for actual inspection work. We now have eight helicopters. They have already proved invaluable in helping to 'freeze' large sites by observing the movement of traffic in and around the area." Even with this increased surveillance, Blix was unable to confirm that Iraq was re-arming with WMDs. But before the UN inspectors could complete their nationwide inspection, President Bush whipped out America's sabers and began rattling them with such an irrational passion, it was clear that he was not going to wait for Blix and company to confirm whether Saddam had an arsenal of WMDs. The U.S., Bush decided, must act.

While the power to declare war is supposed to be held only by Congress – if the U.S. Constitution was actually obeyed – internationalists have convinced many Americans that the president, as he is working under the UN, has the power to commit our troops to war as well. While UN Resolution 1441 did state that Iraq "will face serious consequences" if it continued to defy previous UN resolutions, no provision was included authorizing the use of military force. If the UN was going to authorize a war against Iraq, the Security Council would have had to vote and approve such a measure. In the weeks leading up to the invasion, it was clear that France and Russia were going to use their veto to deny UN authorization for war. So it appears that the Bush administration choose to go off the reservation in order to enforce a UN resolution without direct authorization from the UN itself.

On March 17th, President Bush told the nation that Saddam had 48 hours to leave Iraq or he would be removed by force. "The danger is clear," Bush stated in his address to the nation, "using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other." Two days later, after Saddam failed to step down, American troops began the assault on Iraq. While speaking at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's Annual Policy Conference on March 30, Secretary of State Colin Powell had this to say: "As we meet tonight, our thoughts cannot help but be with the brave young men and women from the United States, from Britain, from Australia, and other coalition partners, who are laying their lives on the line to liberate Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. They are serving their nations and they are serving humanity, to free the Middle East and the world from the threat of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction."

While President Bush's war on Iraq was illegal according to American constitutional standards, the only way it could be legal under the UN's international code is if Saddam did indeed have a substantial arsenal of WMDs. The dust around Baghdad has settled. American dead and wounded

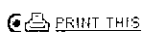
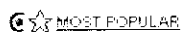
are returning home. And Iraqi civilian casualties are slowly beginning to heal while their nation descends into ethnic chaos. Now where are the weapons responsible for unleashing this devastation?

With Baited Breath

Despite the few false alarms that American troops found chemical weapons or possible toxins, all of these reports proved empty and hollow. What remains clear is that Saddam did not have a WMD arsenal substantial enough to justify President Bush's invasion of Iraq. No "smoking gun" was ever found. "Troops on the ground have searched more than 80 sites that pre-war U.S. intelligence judged the most likely hiding places for chemical and biological weapons as well as evidence of an Iraqi nuclear program," the Associated Press reported, with the U.S. "coming up empty at most of the top suspected weapons sites in Iraq."

While the Bush administration has made quiet assurances that WMDs will be found, as reported by the April 23rd *Telegraph*, the U.S. "dismissed calls for Hans Blix and United Nations Weapons inspectors to return to Iraq." Such a move will surely diminish the credibility of any future WMD "discoveries" that might be made, and destroy what little is left of international respect of U.S. actions. And it really doesn't matter if a few barrels of unweaponized chemicals and antiquated missiles are found, it will still not be enough to justify the American invasion and occupation of a sovereign nation.

Without UN authorization to invade Iraq, President Bush's war (since Congress played no role) can easily be argued as a war of aggression. UN resolutions pertaining to aggressive warfare are by far more significant and dangerous than the ones which were imposed on Iraq. President Bush based his war on the existence of Saddam's WMDs. He was wrong, and America is now viewed as the number one rogue nation as a result. As to what political consequences might follow the belligerent acts of this administration – on both the domestic and international level – it is too early to tell. But if U.S. citizens don't wake up and strip President Bush of his unprecedented power soon, a reorganized, more powerful, and more determined UN just might.

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