



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER
CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL
Maxwell AFB, Alabama

Issue No. 289, 19 September 2003

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Washington Times
September 17, 2003
Pg. 1

U.S. Probe Focuses On Syria Weapons

Reports say nation has Iraq arms

By Bill Gertz, The Washington Times

The U.S. government is investigating intelligence reports that Iraq sent weapons to Syria to hide them from U.N. inspectors and coalition troops in Iraq, a senior State Department official said yesterday.

John Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control, also told a House International Relations subcommittee that Syria is developing medium-range missiles with help from North Korea and Iran that could be fired in nerve gas attacks hundreds of miles from Syria's borders.

He testified in open and closed sessions that Syria continues to take hostile actions against U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq by permitting sympathizers of Saddam Hussein to enter Iraq to kill Americans.

"Syria permitted volunteers to pass into Iraq to attack and kill our service members during the war, and is still doing so," Mr. Bolton said.

"September 11, we were reminded of the need to remain steadfast in recognizing emerging threats to our security," Mr. Bolton said. "In Syria, we see expanding [weapons of mass destruction] capabilities and continued state sponsorship of terrorism."

Mr. Bolton said that "we cannot allow the world's most dangerous weapons to fall into the hands of the world's most dangerous regimes, and will work tirelessly to ensure this is not the case for Syria."

Syria has purchased nuclear goods that indicate it may use a Chinese-made reactor to build nuclear arms, he said. Also, the Syrians are working on offensive biological weapons, he said.

Mr. Bolton stated that Syria has several hundred Scud and SS-21 short-range missiles and has built a longer-range Scud D with help from North Korea. The Scud D has a range of some 310 miles and Syria test-fired one in 2000. Some of the missiles can be outfitted with deadly nerve gas warheads, Mr. Bolton said.

During a closed-door session, Mr. Bolton showed the committee a map highlighting the ranges of Syrian missiles and future missiles, including a version of the North Korean Nodong that has a range of 620 miles, enough to hit targets throughout the Middle East.

Syria has one of the most advanced chemical weapons programs in the Arab world that includes the nerve agent sarin and the more deadly nerve gas known as VX, Mr. Bolton said.

"Syria's missiles are mobile and can reach much of Israel from positions near their peacetime garrisons and portions of Iraq, Jordan and Turkey from launch sites well within the country," Mr. Bolton said in his prepared testimony.

"Damascus is pursuing both solid- and liquid-propellant missile programs and relies extensively on foreign assistance in these endeavors," he said.

Mr. Bolton was scheduled to present the testimony on Syrian weapons programs last month, but elements of the U.S. intelligence community blocked the testimony to avoid offending Damascus, which has established a limited liaison program with the CIA.

Mr. Bolton told the subcommittee that his testimony yesterday was approved by the U.S. intelligence and policy communities.

Asked whether he favored changing the regime of Syrian leader Bashar Assad, Mr. Bolton said "our preference is to solve these problems by peaceful and diplomatic means."

Regarding reports that Iraq hid weapons in Syria, Mr. Bolton said: "We have seen these reports, reviewed them carefully, and see them as cause for concern."

"Thus far, we have been unable to confirm that such transfers occurred," he said.

At the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said he has seen "snippets of information over time" about weapons transfers from Iraq to Syria.

"We know they buried MiG airplanes," Mr. Rumsfeld told reporters. "We know they buried a lot of things. And we know in the prior war they flew their planes into Iran, for example."

Other U.S. officials said numerous intelligence reports from a variety of sources indicate that the transfers of Iraqi weapons took place.

Some of the reports have been in recent weeks, the officials said.

However, many intelligence analysts are reluctant to make judgments on the intelligence because of the recent controversy over Iraq's purported attempts to buy uranium ore from Niger, the officials said.

Syria's government continues to deny that any weapons were transferred.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Florida Republican and chairman of the subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, which held the hearing, said the reports of Iraqi arms shipments to Iraq suggest biological or chemical weapons were sent there.

"There are disputes between agencies," she said in an interview. "No matter what the view, the answer is we really don't know the extent to which this happened. On the other hand, nobody's saying it didn't happen."

Mrs. Ros-Lehtinen said the hearing was held on legislation she is co-sponsoring that would lead to sanctions on Syria for its weapons of mass destruction programs and support for terrorism.

Rep. Gary L. Ackerman, New York Democrat, said the testimony appeared to be a warning to Syria.

"I think the administration is sending a trial balloon to the Syrians to take a look over the border and see what happens to the people who don't listen to us," Mr. Ackerman said in an interview.

<http://www.washtimes.com/national/20030916-113346-3232r.htm>

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Washington Times

September 17, 2003

Pg. 17

Iraq

Scientists Say No Nukes After '91

VIENNA, Austria — Iraqi scientists working under the new provisional government confirmed yesterday U.N. assertions made before the war that Iraq has not had any nuclear weapons program for over a decade.

"There was no way to revive those attempts. There was nothing left," Albas Balassem of Iraq's new Ministry of Science and Technology told reporters after meeting with officials from the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

U.S. officials had contended before invading Iraq in March that the country had been looking for ways to revive its nuclear program cut short by the first Persian Gulf war in 1991.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/worldscene.htm>

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UPI.com

September 16, 2003

Mystery Pneumonia Toll May Be Much Higher

By Mark Benjamin, United Press International

WASHINGTON -- Mysterious pneumonia-like illnesses and breathing problems appear to be striking U.S. troops in greater numbers than the military has identified in an investigation -- including more deaths, according to soldiers and their families.

Some of the soldiers were deployed to Iraq and died but are not part of the Pentagon's investigation. Others who got ill told United Press International they suffered a pneumonia-like illness after being given vaccines, particularly the anthrax shot.

The Pentagon said it is committed to the health of military personnel and that some dead or ill soldiers do not meet criteria for the investigation. Pentagon health officials said a statistical analysis essentially has ruled out vaccines and that the role of smoking has emerged as a leading factor instead.

One Air Force staff sergeant who was deployed to Turkey for Operation Iraqi Freedom told UPI he was hospitalized in Incerlik in March with a pneumonia-like illness, 10 days after his fourth anthrax shot. He got his next anthrax shot in August, and 10 days later was hospitalized in California with what he said was the same pneumonia-like illness.

"They said I had considerable inflammation of the lungs," said Staff Sgt. Neal B. Erickson Sr., 43, in a telephone interview from Moffett Field south of San Francisco. "I had severe chest pains, dizziness and shortness of breath."

He said he does not smoke and that doctors thought he had blood clots or a heart attack. Tests for viruses or bacteria "came back clean," Erickson said. "They basically labeled it as a type of pneumonia."

He said the military is not recognizing that the shots made him sick and that he is afraid of getting the next anthrax shot, scheduled in five months.

"I'm real touchy here. Come a few more months, I'm in line to get another. It's not like we have a choice in the matter." Military personnel are required to take the shots and can be court-martialed if they refuse.

Erickson said there are at least four similar cases in his squadron, including one hospitalization.

The Pentagon is investigating what it says is a mysterious pneumonia cluster that has sickened around 100 soldiers deployed across Southwest Asia. "I'll bet I'm not in (the Pentagon's) numbers," Erickson said.

Pentagon health officials repeatedly have emphasized that the number of sick soldiers in their investigation show there is no "epidemic" among U.S. troops. They are concentrating on 19 service members who have gotten so sick they needed ventilators to breathe; two of those died.

"We do not have an epidemic," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs William Winkenwerder Jr. told reporters last week. "The rates of pneumonia among personnel deployed to Southwest Asia in the past six months are consistent with what we would have expected, and we have data that strongly supports that."

The Pentagon has identified two deaths in its investigation: the July 12 death of Army Spc. Joshua M. Neusche, 20; and the June 17 death of Army Sgt. Michael L. Tosto, 24. Neusche's family wrote Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld last month seeking an independent investigation of his death. Tosto's wife, Stephanie, told UPI last month she was frustrated at the lack of information on her husband's death, but said she thinks vaccines played a role.

At least two more soldiers deployed to Iraq died with fluid in their lungs, according to their families; one of those was found dead in his cot. The Pentagon has not released any information on two more soldiers found dead in Iraq under similar circumstances. In a fifth case, a 20-year-old died after what the Pentagon said were "breathing difficulties" and his mother has said she wants more information.

At least two more soldiers died after experiencing chest pain, including the Aug. 27 death of 43-year-old Lt. Col Anthony L. Sherman, who competed in triathlons and marathons. "The only thing they had to tell me was severe myocardial infarction," said his wife, Lisa Ann, from Pottstown, Pa. "In my heart of hearts, I believe there was more to it than just a heart attack. He was in too good of shape."

All of those deaths appear on the Pentagon list of non-combat related fatalities but were not included in the pneumonia investigation.

The Pentagon said that in its investigation, it has focused on a specific group of ill soldiers. "Other cases are medically reviewed separately because it would be scientifically inappropriate to combine the reviews," Pentagon medical officials told UPI in a written statement.

The investigation is focused on serious cases of illness that occurred between March 1 and Aug. 31 among military personnel who were deployed and who report to the United States Central Command, which includes the Horn of Africa, South and Central Asia and the Northern Red Sea regions, as well as the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq. Pentagon investigators are focusing on soldiers who developed pneumonia in both lungs and were placed on ventilators to breathe.

Some civilian doctors said those parameters are too narrow and ignore cases that could help identify the cause.

"I think the military is making a scientific mistake by restricting the region from which they are collecting these cases," said Dr. Meryl Nass, a doctor who treats soldiers who say they were harmed by vaccines. "There is no scientific reason to limit the geographical envelope from which cases are identified," Nass said. "You want to capture as many cases as possible to investigate, in order to get a broad outline of all the features of the disease."

Pentagon officials said their statistical analysis shows that vaccinated military personnel are no more likely to develop pneumonia than unvaccinated soldiers. Nor are they more likely to develop it soon after getting vaccinated. "We knew beforehand that the rate of pneumonia in anthrax-vaccinated people and in anthrax-unvaccinated people were essentially the same, so our starting point was that this was unlikely," Col. John Grabenstein, deputy director of the Military Vaccine Office, told reporters.

Pentagon health officials said 10 of the 19 cases they are studying had eosinophilia, or the presence of a large number of a specific kind of white blood cell that can indicate an allergic response. Doctors have been unable to detect any virus or bacteria that might have caused the illness in those cases.

A reaction to a drug might cause eosinophilia, according to the Centers for Disease Control doctor assisting the military in the investigation, Dr. Steve Ostroff.

"Obviously, one can have an allergy to a particular type of medication ... and that is certainly a line of investigation we can't entirely exclude," Ostroff told reporters. "There doesn't seem to be any particular type of unifying treatment that was given to these individuals."

A civilian doctor questioned that logic.

"They keep saying there is no common exposure, but every one of those soldiers got vaccinated," said Dr. Jeffrey Sartin, an infectious diseases doctor at the Gundersen Clinic in La Crosse, Wis. "That is one definite common exposure that should not be dismissed out of hand."

"Statistics by themselves only give you part of the story," said Sartin, a former Air Force doctor. "They are getting a bird's eye view of the forest but they are not getting down and looking at the trees."

This spring, Sartin treated Army Spc. Rachel Lacy of Lynwood, Ill., who died April 4 after a pneumonia-like illness. He and a coroner linked that soldier's death to either the anthrax or smallpox vaccines she had received March 2, before falling ill.

Lacy's June 3 death certificate lists vaccines as a possible cause for her lung damage, heart inflammation "with eosinophils," and "lupus-like autoimmune disease."

The military, which did not treat her or perform the autopsy, said her death was likely not due to vaccines.

A number of soldiers who were not deployed said the anthrax vaccine made them sick.

Army Pvt. Dennis W. Drew, 27, got his first anthrax shot April 24 at Fort Hood, Texas, in preparation for going to Iraq. He started feeling ill April 27.

"I started getting a real sharp pain in my chest. I had a hard time breathing and every time I moved, my chest hurt," Drew said. "I checked into a hospital and I found out I had pneumonia in my left lung and myocarditis, a swelling of the heart. Basically, my health has been going down hill ever since."

Drew says he quit smoking four years ago and was in good shape. In addition to his pneumonia, he said he has since suffered from severe headaches, loss of peripheral vision and constant colds. "It is like my immune system does not work anymore," he said. "When I first got to Fort Hood, the doctor there thought the myocarditis might have been caused by the vaccine."

Drew wrote to Congress about his belief that the vaccine has ruined his life with his wife and two small children.

"I would invite anyone who doesn't believe in the adverse reaction of the anthrax vaccine to come spend a day in my home to see first hand what my family and I go through," Drew wrote to House National Security Subcommittee Chairman Chris Shays, R-Conn., on Aug. 31. "We are just victims of wanting to serve our country."

Drew said he knows of three other similar cases at Fort Hood.

Among deaths of soldiers with pneumonia-like symptoms and breathing problems who served in operation Iraqi Freedom, and are not included in the Pentagon investigation:

-- Army Spc. Zeferino E. Colunga, 20, of Bellville, Texas. Colunga died on Aug. 6 after being evacuated from Iraq to Germany. Colunga's family wrote Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld last month seeking an independent

analysis of his death from "this 'so-called' mystery illness." The family said Colunga "died at a hospital in Germany after a battle with pneumonia and a subsequent diagnosis of acute leukemia. We deserve to know why a healthy young man who was supposedly screened and determined fit for deployment would suddenly die," the letter says. The military specifically ruled out Colunga's death as part of the pneumonia cluster.

-- Army Spc. Cory A. Hubbell, 20, of Urbana, Ill. Hubbell died June 26 from what has been reported as "breathing difficulties," and listed by the Pentagon as a "non-combat related cause." He died after being hospitalized at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. Hubbell's mother, Connie Bickers, told the Champaign News-Gazette that the Army is not giving her many answers on the death.

-- Army Spc. Levi B. Kinchen, 21, of Tickfaw, La. Tickfaw died Aug. 9 in Baghdad. A fellow soldier tried to wake him and noticed he was not breathing, according to the Pentagon. He was assigned to 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Polk, La.

-- Army Staff Sergeant Richard S. Eaton Jr., 37, of Guilford, Conn. Eaton was found dead on the morning of Aug. 12. The military has told the family that Eaton died of pulmonary edema, or fluid in his lungs, that might have been heat-related. Eaton's father Richard told UPI he has no reason to doubt the Army's explanation, but he said he has not received a final report on his son.

-- Army Pvt. Matthew D. Bush, 20, of East Alton, Ill. Bush died Aug. 8 in Camp Caldwell, Iraq. A fellow soldier tried to wake him and noticed he was not breathing, according to the Pentagon. Pentagon officials have indicated that his death might have been heat-related.

-- Army Staff Sgt. David L. Loyd, 44, of Jackson, Tenn. Loyd died Aug. 5 in a Kuwaiti hospital after he experienced severe chest pains while on a mission. He was assigned to the 1175th Transportation Company, Army National Guard, Brownsville, Tenn.

-- Lt. Col. Anthony L. Sherman, 43, of Pottstown, Pa. Sherman died on Aug. 27 in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The Pentagon said Sherman died "as a result of non-combat related injury (medical)." His wife, Lisa Ann, said the Army told her Sherman died of "a severe myocardial infarction." She said she was suspicious because he was a marathon runner. Sherman was assigned to the 304th Civil Affairs Brigade, U.S. Army Reserves, based in Philadelphia, Pa.

-- Army Spc. William A. Jeffries, 39, of Evansville, Ind. Jeffries died March 31 at a hospital in Spain after becoming sick in Kuwait. A military official reportedly told Jeffries' family that he suffered a blood clot in his lung and acute pancreatitis.

<http://upi.com/view.cfm?StoryID=20030915-014545-8114r>

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Washington Post
September 17, 2003
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Senate Retains Nuclear Research Funds

Democrats Warn of Renewed Arms Race; House Bill Had Cut Most Spending

By Helen Dewar and Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writers

The Senate turned back a Democratic effort yesterday to eliminate funding for research on a new generation of nuclear weapons, rejecting arguments that the White House-backed project could trigger a new arms race and raise the risk of nuclear war.

Voting 53 to 41, the Republican-led Senate rejected a proposal by Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) to drop \$21 million for research on "mini-nukes" and "bunker-busters" from a \$27.3 billion spending bill for energy and water projects, including the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The Feinstein-Kennedy proposal would also have blocked a proposal to reduce the time needed to resume underground nuclear testing and to construct a new plant to build "pits," or core devices, for nuclear weapons.

Later, Republicans accepted a proposal by Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) to bar anything but research on the two new weapons, meaning the administration would have to come back to Congress for approval before actual development could begin.

Meanwhile, the Air Force is exploring the idea of a new intercontinental ballistic missile system that could carry a low-yield nuclear warhead capable of loitering over targets like an unmanned drone or being redirected in flight, according to a document produced by the Air Force Space Command, which oversees the country's nuclear weapons delivery systems.

Yesterday's vote was the Senate Democrats' second failure this year to block the administration's nuclear initiatives. In May, the Senate voted 51 to 43 to repeal the decade-old ban on research dealing with low-yield nuclear weapons, paving the way for the spending proposals approved yesterday.

But the GOP-led House, defying its reputation as more reliable in its support of the administration, voted in July to cut most of the funding for the nuclear projects. Differences will have to be worked out in negotiations between the two houses. The Senate vote makes it more likely that the administration will get at least some of the money it wants.

The Senate vote to go ahead with research work on the new weapons followed a sometimes emotional debate in which Democrats charged -- and Republicans denied -- that the administration's nuclear initiatives could rekindle the arms race and undermine nonproliferation efforts.

"There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that this administration is reopening the nuclear door," Feinstein told the Senate. "They are doing this to develop essentially a new generation of nuclear weapons," Feinstein told the Senate.

"The last thing the world needs is to have the United States start playing Lone Ranger with nuclear weapons," Kennedy told a news conference. "How can we demand that North Korea and Iran abandon their nuclear weapons programs while we develop a new generation of those weapons ourselves?"

Republicans said no weapons could be built without further congressional action and that it would be irresponsible not to conduct research on weapons capable of dealing with post-Cold War threats, such as terrorists armed with chemical or biological weapons.

"There is nothing in this law that says we will build one additional nuclear weapon," said Sen. Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.), whose state includes major nuclear laboratory complexes.

"One of the pillars of our security is our nuclear deterrent," said Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.). "It must be safe and it must be workable. It must be relevant to the new threats we face."

The Senate action leaves intact administration requests for \$15 million for research on an earth-penetrating nuclear warhead capable of destroying deeply buried bunkers and \$6 million to study development of "low-yield" weapons with a yield of 5 kilotons or less, or about one-third the force of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima at the end of World War II. The high-yield "bunker-buster" would have a force of about 10 times the Hiroshima blast.

Yesterday's vote was generally along party lines, with Virginia's senators favoring the funding and Maryland's senators opposing it. The four Democrats who are running for president were absent and did not vote. The Senate later approved the energy and water spending bill, which will go to a conference with the House.

The document on the Air Force plans lays out concepts for a new missile system, which the Air Force this month made available to potential contractors. It said the Air Force anticipates an acquisition plan beginning in 2005 or 2006.

The new missile would have a precise guidance system that could deliver a sub-kiloton nuclear explosion on mobile or fixed targets, the document said. It would carry the equivalent of several thousand tons of TNT but with significantly less explosive power and radiation than current strategic nuclear weapons, developed during the Cold War to knock out hardened Soviet targets.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A21347-2003Sep16.html>

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Los Angeles Times
September 18, 2003

Report On U.S. Search For Iraqi Weapons Possible Next Week

By Bob Drogin, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — David Kay, the CIA special advisor leading the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, headed home to Washington from Baghdad on Wednesday and is expected to deliver a long-awaited progress report as early as next week, a senior U.S. intelligence official said.

The interim report by Kay, a former United Nations nuclear inspector, will be the first summary of efforts that he and his investigators have made to substantiate the Bush administration's repeated claims that deposed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, before the war, had secretly produced as much as 500 tons of chemical weapons and thousands of gallons of deadly biowarfare agents.

No such stockpiles have been found in the nearly six months since U.S.-led forces invaded Iraq. U.S. officials said the Iraq Survey Group's findings are more likely to highlight evidence of planning to reconstitute unconventional weapons programs on short notice, as well as long-range plans to develop and build such weapons if U.N. sanctions on the sale of dual-use items to Iraq were lifted.

In a radio interview broadcast Wednesday, Hans Blix, former chief United Nations weapons inspector, gave one possible explanation for the failure to find chemical or biological weapons. Blix said he was increasingly convinced

that Saddam Hussein secretly destroyed most of his poison gas and germ weapons shortly after the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

"I'm certainly more and more to the conclusion that Iraq has, as they maintained, destroyed almost all of what they had in the summer of 1991," Blix told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Blix, who headed the U.N. inspection and disarmament effort in Iraq for three years until his retirement last summer, said he now thinks "it's unlikely that anything will be found by the 1,400 U.S.-led weapons hunters in Iraq. Maybe they'll find some documents of interest," he said.

Blix said he believed that Hussein may have sought to convince the U.N. that he had retained weapons of mass destruction, even if he had destroyed his stockpiles, in an effort to deter a potential attack. "I mean, you can put up a sign on your door, 'Beware of the dog,' without having a dog," Blix said.

Former U.N. weapons inspectors and other experts had a mixed response to Blix's suggestion that Hussein destroyed his chemical and biological weapons more than a decade ago. Last spring, Blix told the U.N. Security Council he "presumed" that Iraq still maintained illicit weapons.

"It's logical because these things have a limited shelf life," said Jonathan Tucker, a former bioweapons inspector who now is a senior researcher at the Monterey Institute's nonproliferation center. Tucker said Iraqi scientists were unable to produce stabilized forms of most nerve gases or germ weapons.

"I don't think anyone questions that Iraq was maintaining a capability to produce these weapons," Tucker added.

"The question is whether they maintained a strategic reserve of these weapons."

Greg Theilmann, former head of proliferation and military affairs at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, said Blix's shift "seems very significant" because U.S. officials assumed that Iraq was keeping illicit weapons "because of our inability to verify their destruction. Maybe they [the Iraqis] didn't want to let us prove they had been destroyed."

Bob Baer, a former CIA operative who worked in northern Iraq in the 1990s, said he also believed U.S. intelligence misread Hussein's intentions. "There was no real evidence of these arms," he said. "No defector came out who could prove anything. Nothing was ever picked up by satellite photography. It was just assumed that he kept this stuff." But another former U.N. inspector, who asked not to be identified, said Blix's comment "makes no sense" because U.N. inspectors repeatedly sought in the 1990s to confirm Iraq's claims that it had unilaterally destroyed various weapons and equipment.

"Most of these claims couldn't be verified," he said. "It wasn't just about a lack of information. There was usually an unresolvable conflict between what we were told and what we knew."

Anthony Cordesman, a senior analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, said Blix was engaging in "pure speculation." But he said Kay's initial report would not settle the issue.

"There are likely to be major gaps that we will never account for because so many records were never kept or destroyed," he said.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-wmd18sep18.1.140522.story>

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Christian Science Monitor

September 18, 2003

Pg. 1

The Hunt For A WMD

A reporter traces a suspect Iraqi cylinder

By Cameron W. Barr

We slide the videocassette into the VCR and step back to watch the black-and-white scene playing out on our Baghdad hotel TV set.

Three Iraqi men settle into cushioned chairs around a coffee table. A man with a file folder in his lap leans back and crosses a leg. "Is this the same subject again or a different one?" he demands.

The conversation meanders, before a thick-necked man with a small mouth answers.

"No, no sir, it's a different subject, this is about the canister that they were convinced was VX, about nerve gas."

As a European colleague and I watch the videotape, given to me by an Iraqi businessman, we try to control the mounting excitement of a potential scoop:

Is this evidence of Iraqi manufacturing - or perhaps dismantling - weapons of mass destruction?

The handwritten label on the cassette refers to the Iraqi intelligence service; we later confirm the man with the file folder is Tahir Jalil Habbush, its director. In the US card deck of most wanted Iraqis, he is the Jack of Diamonds.

As the video rolls, it's clear the three men are discussing a container of a chemical they knew they shouldn't have. "[It] will shake the nerves: This material is involved in the production of VX gas. And you know, sir, our international situation," says the man with the small mouth.

After that first viewing last month, we began a two-week investigation to determine the contents of the container - a pressurized cylinder about the size of a phone booth - and what the Iraqis did with it. The result is a tale about an often-frustrating search for the answers amid the bombings, curfews, and suspicions of Iraq under US occupation.

One Iraqi warns us not to dig too deep: "Saddam doesn't want anyone to know about this information." Then he adds: "Every day there are attacks, explosions." Three sources falsely surmise that my colleague and I are agents of the CIA; one smiles at our protests to the contrary.

Our hunt provides a window on the difficult work of United Nations inspectors in Iraq - and the US-led Iraq Survey Group, which is still trying to track down weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Looking for WMD is a sorry task: The physical evidence is elusive, many Iraqi sources have disappeared, and those who are around hardly seem paragons of trustworthiness.

Files, fires, and a 'liberated' videotape

This past April, as the war in Iraq came to its statue-toppling climax, an Iraqi businessman made some alarming discoveries about two houses in his neighborhood, Baghdad's posh Mansour district.

First, two of his children brought home a pair of Kalashnikov assault rifles they had taken from a villa near his house. Its rooms were full of guns, grenade launchers, and ammunition. It had been left open, the contents free for the taking.

Then the businessman and his family learned about another mystery villa, one that stored information: file cabinets, computers, heaps of reports. Starting on April 9 - the day Baghdad fell - men who were apparently Iraqi intelligence agents spent three days at the house. Neighbors wandered over to see them burning files, computer disks, and videotapes.

The guards stopped the businessman from purloining two videos as souvenirs, but one of his sons - an enterprising eight-year-old - managed to spirit a videotape, a half-dozen audiocassettes, and a fistful of photographic negatives out of the house. The audiocassettes were recordings of unremarkable international phone calls made to or from Iraq. The negatives depicted UN weapons inspectors at work.

In early August the businessman and I met for dinner - he was a friend whom I had met on other occasions. A few days later he gave me the videotape, suggesting that it might be worth investigating. He asked not to be identified.

Iraqi spy chief: 'Was the stuff good?'

The tape shows three men sitting in a white-carpeted, taupe-walled room that looks more like an office than a residence. The two cameras recording the meeting - a black-and-white one positioned overlooking the sitting area, a color one at end of the room - appear to have been hidden. No one acknowledges that the meeting is being videotaped.

Mr. Habbush, the Iraqi intelligence chief, is at the head of the low table, smoking a cigarette. The other participants are identified on the tape's label as Abdul Wahab, director of the scientific division of the intelligence service, and "citizen" Salah Abed Nasir. It emerges in the conversation that he is a factory owner who has worked for many years as an informer.

Initially, the three discuss a sting operation, conducted a few days earlier, to arrest men who were in possession of "the canister that they were convinced was VX" - a lethal nerve agent that Iraq used during its war with Iran during the 1980s.

Habbush: "Was the stuff good?"

Mr. Abdul Wahab: "Sir, the first test proved it came from the Muthanna Establishment, where they used to make chemical weapons..."

The Muthanna State Establishment was Iraq's main chemical weapons development and manufacturing site, located 60 miles outside Baghdad. UN inspectors controlled Muthanna in the early 1990s, destroying stocks of chemical weapons, the ingredients used in their production, and related facilities.

Abdul Wahab goes on to indicate that the intelligence service plans to sell the cylinder to the "Arab Cleaning Establishment" via the National Monitoring Directorate, an Iraqi agency initially formed in the early 1990s as a liaison between the government and UN inspectors. He seems confident that the transfer can be accomplished discreetly. The Monitoring Directorate "won't bring the name of our apparatus into it," he says.

The audio is garbled here; we can't be sure if we're getting the name of the Arab Cleaning Establishment exactly right. Is it a legitimate company or a cover for chemical weapons factory?

Abdul Wahab: "They [the National Monitoring Directorate] will take it [the cylinder] to them [the Arab Cleaning Establishment] and they will test it and if it's not expired, then it's OK, and they will work with it, for a sum we will agree on. If it's expired we won't be able to benefit from it."

To confirm the accuracy of what we're hearing, we employ four different interpreters - including one non-Iraqi - to get clear Arabic and English transcripts of the tape. Even so, we don't yet know what we have. When did the conversation take place? What was inside the container? The informer's statements are confusing: "the canister they were convinced was VX" and "this material is involved in the production of VX". Which one was it? We also wonder if the tape is a hoax or even a video of a training exercise.

Going door to door, looking for the ezzis

Nailing down the timing is easy. We show the video to a former Iraqi Army general who says there's no doubt that the man holding the file is Habbush, confirming the impressions of our interpreters and the businessman.

On the tape Abdul Wahab refers to Habbush as the "director of the apparatus," a reference to Mukhabarat, the Iraqi intelligence service. Habbush took office in 1999, so the conversation took place no earlier than that year.

Our next step is to try to find the men shown on the tape or those named in their discussion.

Habbush is one of 13 Iraqis on the US most wanted list who have not been killed or captured. Finding him seems unlikely. It appears just as daunting to try to locate the science director, Abdul Wahab; as a senior Iraqi intelligence official he is probably also in hiding.

That leaves the third man on the tape: Nasir, the informer and factory owner. It also seems possible to find two other men - Nasir's relatives by marriage - mentioned in the discussion.

Nasir had set up the sting operation to recover the cylinder, but one of the men who was arrested is his wife's cousin, an engineer named Majed al-Ezzi. Nasir tells the intelligence chief that he's being threatened by the Ezzi family and that Walid al-Ezzi - an officer in the intelligence service - has told the family that Nasir is responsible for getting Majed thrown in jail.

Ezzi is the name of a well known tribe in Iraq; we decide to try to tap into the clan's internal network.

In a city where vast sections have no telephone service, where the most recent phone directory is a decade old, and where there is no "information" operator, we employ the only means available: We start knocking on doors.

We ask around Baghdad for Ezzis, and ask them if they know of a Majed who was arrested by - or a Walid who worked for - the intelligence service. After several days, we have nothing. At times, our plan seems like driving around Germany just after World War II and asking people to help us find relatives who had been in the Gestapo. Increasingly disheartened, we drive an hour outside of Baghdad to a village called Tarmiya - the seat of the Ezzi tribe.

There we meet Salah al-Ezzi, an imposing man with a dark mustache and a tiny patch of beard just below his lower lip. The leader of the tribe, he greets us in his grassy garden as the skin-searing heat of another summer day begins to wane.

Finally, one of the pieces of the puzzle snaps into place.

Dr. Ezzi remembers Majed's "big problems" with the Iraqi intelligence service over the cylinder. "[Majed's] friend bought the stuff, but he didn't know it was harmful," he recalls. "He wanted to take it back to the government, but before they could do that, someone informed on them."

"Bingo," I mutter to our interpreter. He doesn't get the reference. But we all understand that the tape is real.

Majed and his friend were released, the doctor says, after the family proved that the cylinder was unwittingly purchased from a scrap dealer. He identifies the informer as Salah Abed Nasir - the third man on our tape - and gives us the location of Nasir's house in Baghdad. He also suggests a couple of ways to find Majed in the capital.

Because Walid was a Mukhabarat officer, tracing him is a different matter.

"We don't know where he is," Salah says. He also can't tell us whether the "stuff" in the cylinder was nerve gas or something else

What's in the cylinder? Nasir's revelation

We waste much of the next day trying to find Majed's electrical supply shop in Baghdad's main market. There are hundreds of such shops; we ask for Majed in dozens of them. We hear about one shopkeeper named Majed, but he is not our Majed al-Ezzi.

Parched, tired, and discouraged, we go in search of Nasir's house - a far easier task. We find it in a neighborhood of large homes and gardens hidden behind walls. One of his sons rides with us to show us the way to his father's factory.

We wait for a few minutes in the front office for Nasir to emerge from a back room. And then there he is - he of the thick neck and small mouth - a white-haired man who is fitter and more robust than he had seemed on the screen.

On the tape, Nasir says he has served the Mukhabarat since 1982, and sounds eager to work abroad as a spy for Iraq. "We are all servants of Saddam Hussein," he tells Habbush, the intelligence chief.

In person, he quickly tells us that he has already been to see the US-led administration of Iraq in order to provide information about the former regime and its weapons. "I have a lot of information," he stresses. He serves us ice-cold Cokes.

Nasir's desire to play for the new team in town may explain his willingness to speak with us about the cylinder, a bit of information he says he has not shared with the Americans. He repeatedly tells us we are US intelligence agents, ignoring our protests.

He insists he acted properly in the affair of the cylinder "because it was stolen, it was in bad people's hands." He refuses to identify them - "I cannot say who it is or I will be assassinated the next day."

During our conversation, Nasir makes tantalizing references to a set of photographs of the cylinder. At first he balks at showing us, then changes his mind. He shuffles through a disorganized pile of snapshots in his desk and extracts half a dozen.

They depict the cylinder lying horizontally next to a brick wall, two words neatly stenciled on its side: hydrogen fluoride.

Bingo.

Hydrogen fluoride (HF) is a highly corrosive chemical that has a wide variety of industrial applications, including rust removal, petroleum refining, and cleaning porcelain teeth. It is also used in the production of the nerve agents sarin and cyclosarin - not, however, VX.

When UN weapons inspectors took over the Muthanna facility in the early 1990s they destroyed seven tons of HF, among many other proscribed materials.

Iraq was entitled to import HF during the period UN sanctions were in force, from 1991 until 2003, because of the chemical's utility in various peaceful industries. But the UN monitored the import and use of HF in Iraq, in an attempt to make sure that none of the chemical was diverted to military use.

"One cylinder of HF is of no military significance," says Ron Manley, a chemical engineer who headed UN efforts to destroy Iraq's chemical weapons capabilities in the early 1990s. But he says it might have been useful to the Iraqis in order to create a small quantity of nerve agent or to sharpen the skills of a weapons scientist. "They were short of a lot of key chemicals like [HF]," Mr. Manley says.

Stolen, sold, or hidden by the Iraqi government?

After eight long days of work in the Iraq summer heat we now know what was in the cylinder - not as "sexy" as nerve gas, as one WMD expert tells us, but still an illegal substance in the hands of the Iraqi intelligence service. Where did it come from, we wonder, and what did the Mukhabarat do with it?

We finally track down Majed al-Ezzi in his easier-to-find Baghdad engineering office. He says what the tape says: a fellow engineer and one of the man's relatives had bought the cylinder at a scrap auction in 1996 believing it was empty and that it could be recycled for profit.

In 2000, the two men asked Majed's help in trying to "hand it over to the government without any problem," he recalls. Majed turned to Nasir because of his intelligence connections. In the end, the engineers and the relative wound up in a Mukhabarat prison for their trouble.

We ask Majed about trying to contact the fellow engineer and the relative who had made the actual purchase. "Don't push it," he says, warning us that forces loyal to Saddam Hussein don't want such matters made public. He too hints that we work for the US government.

Our talks with Majed and Nasir leave us with two theories about the origin of the cylinder. One explanation is that it emerged from Muthanna by accident. On the tape, Abdul Wahab explains what happened when Mukhabarat investigators went to look for the scrap dealer: "They didn't find him.... But his friends said that he bought it from an auction; the man from the Muthanna Establishment confirmed that he sold . . . in an open auction, empty containers of the same type. They said maybe it got out by mistake."

Says the former UN WMD chief Manley: "Given the state of the site and the size of the site" - the Muthanna State Establishment covers about nine square miles and was heavily bombed during the 1991 Gulf war - "it is not unlikely that a single cylinder could have gone amiss."

But Majed and Nasir each offer us the same alternative theory: The cylinder was removed from Muthanna at the instructions of the government, many years before the sting operation. It was common knowledge among Iraqi engineers, Majed says, that officials were asking workers in the mid-1990s to store documents and materials away from places that might be inspected or bombed, even items as cumbersome as a pressurized cylinder full of deadly gas.

The accounts of the two men enable us fix the time of the videotaped conversation: the summer of 2000.

But what did the Mukhabarat do with the cylinder after retrieving it?

Our best lead regarding its fate is the garbled videotape reference to the Arab Cleaning Establishment, which in Arabic is the name of an enterprise known in English as the Arab Company for Detergent Chemicals. Owned by a consortium of Arab governments - including Iraq's - it maintains a head office in Baghdad and a factory north of Tikrit that converts kerosene into a raw material for detergent.

A soap factory field of HF cylinders

We visit the plant unannounced. Zuhair Abed Rashid, acting director general of the company, cordially receives us into his wood-paneled office. A middle-aged geochemist with a genial, nothing-to-hide disposition, he listens as we explain what we would like to know.

Then he leads us outside, takes the wheel of a white, four-seater pickup, and gives us a tour.

The plant is a tangled forest of dun-colored vats, ladders, and pipes rising out of the dun-colored desert. Flares from the plant and a nearby refinery scar the summer sky with orange flames.

Mr. Rashid indicates the tanks that store kerosene and paraffin. Toward the back of the lot, near a chain-link fence, he points out scores of discarded cylinders of HF, which is used as a catalyst in the plant's chemical process. Some are blue, some gray, some off-white.

One cylinder looks almost identical to the grayish-white one in Nasir's photographs. We pull out the photos, hoping to find a match.

Rashid points out a dozen more just like it positioned next to the back fence. Even the stencil on the side - hydrogen fluoride - is the same as on the cylinder in the pictures. When filled, the cylinders each contain a little more than 1,500 pounds of HF.

We carefully compare the 13 cylinders with the photos. None match.

We return a few days later, to review some of the records in Rashid's office. He's certain that the cylinders he has shown us came from the Muthanna State Establishment in a shipment of more than 203 metric tons of HF the plant received in 1991. He denies ever receiving any more HF from the government, not a single cylinder in 2000 or later. He insists that all of his company's intake of HF has been monitored by UN inspectors, who visited the plant three times in the months before the war and several times during the 1990s.

What Rashid doesn't say is that it might have been easier for all concerned to accept the cylinder off the books.

Recording the receipt of a Muthanna cylinder might have raised uncomfortable questions that would lead back to the Mukhabarat .

We remember the science director's comment, on the videotape, about using the National Monitoring Directorate as a conduit to the Arab Cleaning Establishment: "They won't bring the name of our apparatus into it." And as Manley, the former UN inspector, observes, "the Iraqis are good at keeping paperwork, but they are also good at keeping the paperwork that is required rather than that which is accurate."

Just as the trail seems to come to an end, Rashid raises our hopes again.

There is one more Muthanna cylinder we haven't seen, located in a scrap yard in front of the plant. He asks if we want to have a look.

We pile back into his pickup. Sure enough, in a field of more than a hundred empty HF containers, lies one more of the type in the photographs.

It is not the same cylinder.

Epilogue

Our cylinder may still be out there. It may have been put to some nefarious use. But from the available evidence, it appears the Iraqis followed a responsible course of action in the summer of 2000. Learning about a loose cylinder of HF, the Iraqi Mukhabarat mounted an operation to recover it. Then the officials disposed of the chemical - at least according to the intention stated on the videotape - by sending it to a soap factory. In other words, they dismantled this WMD.

That's how our story appears to Scott Ritter, who served as chief weapons inspector for the UN Special Commission in Iraq (UNSCOM) in the 1990s and who campaigned against the war. "The Mukhabarat appears to have done the right thing without getting their name involved," he says. "This is some of the hardest evidence that Iraq did not have a secret chemical weapons program."

Ewen Buchanan, spokesman for a team of UN inspectors that visited the country just before the war, says the Iraqis often sent banned chemicals to factories for disposal. He won't go as far as Mr. Ritter, but Mr. Buchanan does note that there were no weapons inspectors in Iraq at that time in 2000, so the tape offers a glimpse what the Iraqis did when the country wasn't subject to on-the-ground UN scrutiny.

"That's surprising - that they did the right thing without UNSCOM," he says.

A who's who guide to the cylinder hunt

Three men in the videotape:

Tahir Jalil Habbush - director of Iraqi intelligence service, Mukhabarat. Jack of Diamonds in US most-wanted deck.

Abdul Wahab - director of the scientific division of Iraqi intelligence service.

Salah Abed Nasir - factory owner, and informer for intelligence service.

Mentioned in the tape:

Muthanna State Establishment - Iraq's main chemical weapons development and manufacturing site.

National Monitoring Directorate - Iraqi agency that was liaison between the government and UN weapons inspectors.

Majed al-Ezzi - engineer arrested in sting operation set up by Iraqi intelligence; cousin of Abed Nasir's wife.
Walid al-Ezzi - Iraqi intelligence officer, who tells Ezzi family that it was Nasir, the informer, who got Majed arrested.

Found later:

Salah al-Ezzi - leader of the Ezzi tribe.

Zuhair Abed Rashid - acting director general of Arab Company for Detergent Chemicals aka Arab Cleaning Establishment.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0918/p01s04-woiq.html>

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Baltimore Sun

September 18, 2003

Anthrax Survivors Find Life A Struggle

Attacks: Debilitating symptoms dog those exposed to the spores, leaving most unable to work.

By Scott Shane, Sun Staff

Two years after the first major bioterrorism attack in U.S. history nearly killed them, most of the inhalation anthrax survivors are still suffering severe physical and psychological aftereffects that have left them unable to work.

"Some days I get up, and after an hour and a half I have to lie back down," says David R. Hose, 61, who was infected on his job at a State Department mail-handling facility.

Before he breathed in the microscopic spores, Hose says in an exhausted voice from his home in Winchester, Va., he was a healthy man who routinely put in 12-hour days handling heavy diplomatic mail pouches. Today, after the anthrax and a near-fatal bout of pneumonia, "I'm on three heart medications. I have asthma. I'm extremely weak."

Whoever dropped letters loaded with anthrax spores into a blue mailbox in the Princeton, N.J., business district Sept. 18 and Oct. 9, 2001, gave the nation a taste of the devastation that bioterrorism can cause.

The government rushed to spend billions of dollars stockpiling vaccines for smallpox and anthrax and bulking up defenses against the chance that al-Qaida might try germ warfare. Universities battled for biodefense grants and built high-security labs.

But on the human scale where the postal attacks found their random targets, some victims of the mailings feel lost in the shuffle. They struggle to get by on worker's compensation, fight over medical bills and feel as though they have borne the brunt of the mail attacks alone. Their anxiety is not eased by the fact that nearly two years into the FBI's costly, much-criticized hunt for the anthrax mailer, the culprit is still at large.

"These guys are also victims of terrorism," says Ramesh Patel, whose wife, Jyotsna Patel, 45, a New Jersey postal worker, survived inhalation anthrax and is still tormented by weakness, nightmares and crying bouts.

"I would say they should be treated like anyone who was at the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. But they've been completely forgotten."

The billions of spores that spewed from the anthrax letters infected 11 people with inhalation anthrax; six survived.

That surprised experts, who had expected a death rate even with treatment above 75 percent. An additional 17 people developed the blackened skin sores of cutaneous anthrax; all recovered.

But though they are grateful to be alive, the inhalation anthrax victims still feel the effects of the anthrax toxin every day.

Fatigue, says New Jersey postal worker Norma J. Wallace, 58, "is a given at this point. The shortness of breath still comes. I still have joint pain."

By memorizing Bible verses and working through books of brain-teasers, Wallace says, she believes she has nearly overcome the memory problems that trouble the survivors.

Still, "I have to consciously focus on what I'm doing, or I lose my train of thought."

That's typical, says Dr. Tyler C. Cymet, who heads family medicine at Sinai Hospital and is assistant professor of internal medicine at the School of Medicine. He has conducted telephone interviews with all but one of the six anthrax survivors every three months since late 2001.

His colleague, Dr. Gary J. Kerkvliet, an internist at Sinai with a Hopkins faculty appointment, continues to care for William R. Paliscak Jr., a criminal investigator for the U.S. Postal Inspection Service who has been severely ill since shortly after he was showered with anthrax-laden dust while removing an overhead filter at the Brentwood postal center in Washington.

Paliscak never tested positive for the *Bacillus anthracis* bacteria or its toxin, but Kerkvliet and Cymet are convinced that his debilitating illness resulted from his exposure.

They say they understand the bitterness of the survivors, who have gotten no special financial help or medical care from the U.S. government. Only one has been able to return to work - the oldest, Florida mailroom worker Ernesto Blanco, 75.

Cymet contrasts the lack of federal outreach with the Israeli government's rapid and sustained support for victims of terrorism, which he witnessed after responding to a bombing during a recent trip to Israel.

"It's not medicine's finest moment," Cymet says of the haphazard follow-up with the survivors. "We need leadership."

In his periodic 20-question telephone survey of the inhalation anthrax survivors, Cymet has found that five still report similar symptoms: weakness, memory problems, cold sweats, low-grade fever and headaches.

"It's tough to ferret out what's psychological, what's physiological and what's post-traumatic stress disorder," he says.

Cymet's informal survey appears to have reached more of the inhalation anthrax survivors than any other study, but he admits that his phone interviews are a poor substitute for a full-scale study. As a hospital doctor with a busy practice, it is all he can manage, he says.

One study of the anthrax survivors - cutaneous as well as inhalation - is being conducted by Dr. Mary E. Wright of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in Bethesda. Confidentiality rules prohibit Wright from naming participants, and she declined to give their number.

Of four inhalation anthrax survivors interviewed by The Sun, only one, Leroy "Rich" Richmond, a Brentwood postal worker who lives in Stafford, Va., said he was participating.

Wright's study seeks to understand "the natural history of anthrax" and to devise a protocol for the treatment of future victims, she says. Because the last case of inhalation anthrax in the United States before 2001 occurred in 1976, Wright says, "anthrax is new territory."

She says it's too early to discuss findings but expresses sympathy for the survivors. "I've talked to these people, too, and I understand their anger and frustration," she says.

Richmond, 58, says he still suffers from "continuous fatigue" and memory loss and is glad to be in Wright's study. But he feels the government's response to the victims should be more than just asking for cooperation with research. "We've been cast aside. We're just an afterthought," he says.

If the official anthrax survivors feel neglected, Paliscak, the ailing postal inspector, has not even been given an official diagnosis of the illness that has shattered his life.

Paliscak, 39, was a hockey-playing, weight-lifting picture of health before following a supervisor's orders to remove an air filter above a heavily contaminated mail-sorting machine in the Brentwood postal center in October 2001.

A few days later, he fell severely ill. He has spent roughly half of the time since then in the hospital with severe breathing problems, mental confusion, extreme weakness and glandular dysfunction.

"He was heavily exposed to anthrax," says Kerkvliet, his physician. "And after that, physiologically, he fell apart." Months of testing found no cause other than anthrax for his ills, he says.

Kerkvliet says he is frustrated that the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have not taken an interest in his patient's medical mystery. If Paliscak's case shows that a person can be devastated by anthrax exposure without testing positive, that could expose flaws in the testing regimen that should be corrected before any outbreak, Kerkvliet says.

It is little comfort to the survivors that their experience has fueled a bio-preparedness boom. This month, about the time the government announced \$350 million in grants to create biodefense programs nationwide, Hose said he learned he will have to start paying \$548 a month for health insurance. That's a quarter of his worker's compensation.

Meanwhile, the FBI's failure to catch the anthrax mailer has given rise to dark conspiracy theories on the part of several victims. Hose, for example, believes the anthrax mailings might have been a "black ops" government program designed to pump money into the biodefense and drug industries.

His thinking is based partly on the fact that the 2001 attack involved a few teaspoons of powder - not the scale to be expected from al-Qaida. Speculating about future attacks, Hose projects his suffering onto thousands of people.

"If they sprayed anthrax from the tops of buildings in 10 major cities, we'd be done for," Hose says. "The sick people would overwhelm the hospitals. And the spores don't die. They'd be out there forever."

<http://www.sunspot.net/news/nationworld/bal-te.anthrax18sep18,0,5317905.story?coll=bal-news-nation>

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Philadelphia Inquirer
September 19, 2003

No Smallpox Found In Iraq Hunt

Top U.S. scientists found no signs that Hussein's government had been making it, sources said.

By Dafna Linzer, Associated Press

Top U.S. scientists assigned to the weapons hunt in Iraq found no evidence that Saddam Hussein's government was making or stockpiling smallpox, the Associated Press has learned from senior military officers involved in the search.

Smallpox fears were part of the case the Bush administration used to build support for invading Iraq - and they were raised again as recently as last weekend by Vice President Cheney.

A three-month search by "Team Pox" turned up only signs to the contrary - disabled equipment that had been rendered harmless by U.N. inspectors, Iraqi scientists deemed credible who gave no indication they had worked with smallpox, and a laboratory thought to be back in use that was covered in cobwebs.

Fears that smallpox could be used as a weapon led the Bush administration to launch a vaccination campaign for about 500,000 U.S. military personnel after the Sept. 11 attacks, and to order enough vaccine to inoculate the entire U.S. population if needed. President Bush was vaccinated against the disease, which kills about a third of those infected.

The negative smallpox findings reported to U.S. intelligence agencies came nearly six months after the administration went to war to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction that Hussein long denied having and that the U.S. military has not been able to find.

Smallpox was declared eradicated worldwide in 1980. All samples of the virus were to have been destroyed except those held by special labs in Atlanta and in Russia, but some experts fear Russian samples could have gotten into the hands of hostile nations.

Two of the six members of Team Pox - whose existence and work had not been previously disclosed - have left Iraq. The rest remain involved in other aspects of the weapons hunt, said the officers who described the smallpox search for the first time.

Although Team Pox is no longer operational, having carried out its work between May and July, its findings do not dismiss the possibility that smallpox still could be discovered, said the officers, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

However, there remains little to pursue in this area.

"We found no physical or new anecdotal evidence to suggest Iraq was producing smallpox or had stocks of it in its possession," one of the military officers said.

When Team Pox searched a key site in Iraq, the defunct Darwah foot-and-mouth disease center, it found the facility in the same condition U.N. inspectors had left it in seven years earlier. The smallpox team found cobwebs covering much of the inside, although a CIA National Intelligence Estimate said the Iraqis were refurbishing the facility.

U.S. satellite images had spotted trucks pulling up in the last year - an indication of renewed activity, the team was told. Investigations on the ground revealed the trucks belonged to black marketeers stealing scrap metal and parts. Bush administration officials often cited smallpox when describing Hussein's intentions - and continue to do so. On Sunday, Cheney said two trailers discovered in Iraq could have been used to make smallpox. He referred to the trailers as "mobile biological facilities" - a characterization that has been disputed by intelligence analysts within two U.S. agencies that believe the trailers were used to fill weather balloons.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, making the case for war in February at the United Nations, said Hussein "has the wherewithal to develop smallpox."

Despite those suspicions, Pentagon planners did not organize a specific search for smallpox when they put together a post-Hussein weapons hunt involving hundreds of military personnel.

"There was some discussion about creating specialized teams, but we didn't have enough people," said Lt. Col.

Michael Slifka, who planned the weapons hunt for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

The original search teams, which disbanded when a Pentagon-led effort took over in August, did not have an investigative capability and did not include experts in specific areas such as smallpox.

Surprised by the configuration, a handful of U.S. biologists and virologists, who had been sent to Kuwait and then Baghdad with little instruction except to help, set up Team Pox on their own.

<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/nation/6806527.htm>

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Washington Times
September 19, 2003

Inside The Ring

By Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough
Weapons hunt

Chief weapons inspector David Kay has told senators he expects his final report to conclude that Saddam Hussein had an active biological weapons program at the time the United States invaded in March. But Mr. Kay, who is the CIA's top weapons sleuth in the Iraq Survey Group, did not offer proof.

That, he said earlier this summer in a closed briefing, will come in his final report. Like Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, that issue too is wrapped in mystery. Senators expected it this month. Mr. Kay is due in Washington later this month and may have something to say on the matter then.

"I think if they had found something significant, it would have leaked out by now," said one U.S. official.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld met with Mr. Kay during a trip to Iraq earlier this month. Mr. Rumsfeld said he did not ask the inspector if he had found weapons of mass destruction.

Iraqi missiles to U.S.

The U.S. military plans to send several Iraqi short-range missiles from Iraq to the United States to better study the missiles' capabilities and to find out if they were built with illegal foreign assistance, according to Pentagon officials.

One official said the objective is to learn "how technically advanced" the missiles are. "We'll be looking to see if there is anything we didn't know," the official said.

The missiles also will help in tracking the proliferation of missile components and materials.

A group of missile specialists belonging to the Joint Captured Material Exploitation Team, which is part of the Iraq Survey Group, helped find and ship the missiles to the United States.

Several al Samoud 2 missiles were sent to Missile and Space Intelligence Center in Huntsville, Ala., and the National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville.

Five al Samoud 2s were fired by Iraq during combat operations and all five were knocked out with U.S. Patriot interceptors. The al Samoud has a range of about 93 miles.

<http://www.washtimes.com/national/inring.htm>

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