

Secret files on Baghdad's weapons plans

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US

Before the 1990 arms embargo, Iraq purchased 90 per cent of its military hardware from the Soviet Union. Since then it has relied on arms smuggled across the Syrian and Jordanian borders. The majority of the illicit cargoes are machine parts to help to maintain Saddam's ageing tanks and air force. Most of these are reported to come from Eastern Europe or former Soviet republics, where disaffected and corrupt officers help to maintain a large black market. In April this year, it was alleged that Czech-made rockets had reached Baghdad via Syria, although these claims were strenuously denied by Damascus. Much of this hardware is purchased using oil smuggled out of Iraq via Turkey and Iran.

IRAQ FACTFILE

Area: 169,295 sq miles
Population: 23.3 million (World Bank 2000), 16,278,316 (1987 census)
Language: Official language is Arabic. Minority languages include Kurdish (about 15%), Turkic and Aramaic.
Religion: About 95% of the population are Muslims, more than 50% of whom are Shia, the rest Sunni.
Life expectancy: male 66, female 68.

IRAQ FACTFILE

Population growth: 2.4% (1999)
Urban population: 76.8% (2000 est)
Literacy rate: male 65.6%, female 45.9%
GDP: US\$149,036 million (1997)
GDP per capita: \$3,388 (1998)
Average annual income: \$593 (est)
Major cities: Baghdad (capital, 3,841,268, 1987), Basra (406,296), Kirkuk (418,624), Mosul (664,221)

NUCLEAR THREAT Although it appears unlikely that Saddam has a nuclear capacity, his links with East European and ex-Soviet mafia could provide a channel for weapon grade uranium and plutonium. Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Bulgaria all have quantities of highly enriched uranium that in many cases are far from secure.

SITES ASSOCIATED WITH IRAQ'S WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION PROGRAMME

Active: Nuclear, Biological, Chemical
Damaged or destroyed: Nuclear, Biological, Chemical

OIL RESERVES

Iraq has proven reserves of 113 billion barrels. Ultimate total reserves could exceed 300 billion barrels. Current capacity is about three million barrels a day but it is pumping at about half that. Capacity could rise to seven or eight million barrels a day within a maximum of five years if giant fields are developed and there is stability in a post-Saddam Iraq.

World oil reserves (billion barrels)

2001: 295
2002: 300
2003: 305
2004: 310
2005: 315
2006: 320
2007: 325
2008: 330
2009: 335
2010: 340
2011: 345
2012: 350
2013: 355
2014: 360
2015: 365
2016: 370
2017: 375
2018: 380
2019: 385
2020: 390

Source: BP statistical review of world energy, June 2002. Figures for end of 2001.

THE only known store of nuclear material in Iraq sits in heavyweight sealed barrels at Tawatha research facility south of Baghdad. It consists of several tonnes of low-grade uranium and is monitored by an international agency with the full co-operation of the Iraqi regime.

The legitimacy of the Tawatha nuclear material — 18 tonnes of low enriched uranium and “several tonnes” of depleted and natural uranium — contrasts sharply with what Western intelligence agencies believe is President Saddam Hussein’s clandestine programme to build a nuclear bomb and to develop other forms of weapons of mass destruction based on chemical and biological agents.

The unpublished “ dossier ” on Saddam’s secret weapons that the British Government says will be unveiled at the appropriate time — after a decision has been taken to launch a military attack on Iraq — goes some way towards outlining the threat.

However, senior Whitehall sources made it clear that it was not “ revelatory ”. The dossier, which has had to be redrafted several times, is intended to give an unclassified insight into Iraq’s progress in developing unconventional weapons since the United Nations inspections came to an abrupt halt in December 1998.

Tony Blair is getting no inside information from President Bush about his plans for dealing with Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction programme, according to a former senior American diplomat, Richard Holbrooke who was United States Ambassador to the United Nations under President Clinton, revealed in *The Washington Post* that a “ senior adviser ” to Mr Blair had told him “ bitterly ” that Mr Bush “ was giving Blair nothing ” in return for his unstinting support on Iraq.

Mr Blair’s official spokesman refused to comment yesterday on Mr Holbrooke’s remark, but said that London and Washington were “ 100

Tony Blair has promised to reveal the true extent of Iraq’s drive to acquire weapons of mass destruction, but so far he has kept the British public in the dark. **Michael Evans** assesses the evidence that could take us to war

would change the whole power balance in the Middle East.”

Although the Government has been anxious to keep the contents of the dossier to itself, the thrust of its message has become clear without the opportunity to send in international inspectors to check out suspected weapons-of-mass-destruction laboratories, the world will remain dangerously ignorant of what Saddam has managed to achieve in the past three and a half years.

The sources said that Saddam had “ several hundred ” scientists and engineers fully employed on developing nuclear, chemical and biological systems “ All of them know from the experience of the few defectors who have managed to escape to America and Britain that Saddam takes ruthless revenge on the families of those who dare to betray the secrets of his weapons programme,” one said.

Not only close relatives but also the extended family of defectors have been murdered as a warning to others who may be tempted to go over to the West, the source said.

Drawing on the discoveries made by the United Nations weapons inspectors before they had to leave Baghdad in December 1998, those contributing to the Whitehall dossier have said that Iraq possessed the capability, the know-how and much of the equipment needed to build a nuclear device.

Saddam’s team of nuclear scientists still lack the fissile material to complete the bomb, and there have been no indications from satellite imagery of any attempt to build a facility capable of enriching uranium to bomb-grade quality for that complex process the Iraqis would need substantial infrastructure and a power supply that could be spotted by American spy satellites.

Iraq has the know-how to create highly enriched uranium but the equipment needed was all destroyed by the UN inspectors after the 1991 Gulf War “ But you don’t need large buildings to develop a

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Shooting party, Saddam celebrates in Baghdad

make the case for overthrowing Saddam

IRAQ'S WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

June 1981

Israeli F16s destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor at the Osirak research site to prevent Baghdad from acquiring fissile material



March 1988

Iraqi Air Force drops bombs with mustard gas warheads on the (Kurdish town of Halabja) in northern Iraq, killing 5 000 Kurds and wounding another 5 000. The attack was in revenge for the Kurds' support for Tehran in the Iran/Iraq War

May 1990

At an Arab conference in Baghdad, Saddam Hussein produces two nuclear triggers, a key component of any nuclear weapon. He claims that one was manufactured in Iraq



January 1991

US-led coalition launches Operation Desert Storm after Iraq invades Kuwait. Frontline soldiers are equipped with nuclear, biological and chemical suits and combat troops are inoculated against anthrax, plague and nerve agents. Iraq fires conventional Scud missiles at Israel and Saudi Arabia



October 1991

UN inspectors find 46 000-chemical artillery shells and later come across thousands of gallons of nerve agents for biological warfare



December 1998

UN arms inspectors leave Baghdad after Saddam refuses to co-operate in UN search for chemical and biological weapons

nuclear bomb if you can acquire weapons-grade enriched material from other sources, such as the black market," the source said

There are so many research facilities across the former Soviet Union that still have stocks of highly enriched uranium, many of them inadequately guarded, that the biggest fear is that Saddam will be able to shorten the time needed for building a bomb by buying smuggled weapons-grade nuclear material. Last month four men were arrested by police in Georgia with nearly 2kg (4 4lb) of enriched uranium

The low-grade uranium stored at Tawatha has remained untouched by the Iraqis, who every January welcome a team of four or five nuclear experts from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency to examine the sealed barrels. An agency official confirmed that the seals had never been tampered with, and that the annual visit to Tawatha had clearly acted as a deterrent to the Iraqis

However, there have been many indications of Saddam's continuing efforts to develop nuclear weapons by acquiring dual-use equipment which might seem innocent on the import documents but can be adapted for his unconven-

tional weapons programme. Three years ago Iraq was reported to have ordered half a dozen "ithotripters" machines that use shock waves to get rid of journey stones; but UN experts said they also had a practical use for triggering atomic devices

Before the UN inspectors had to leave Baghdad, they had concluded that Saddam's nuclear scientists had mastered the crucial technique of creating an implosive shock wave that squeezes the nuclear material to trigger a chain reaction. The inspectors also believed it was possible that the Iraqis had managed to design a sufficiently small bomb to fit on to a Scud ballistic missile. They were believed to be at least ten such missiles hidden somewhere in Iraq. Most of Iraq's Scuds were destroyed by the UN tanks

The agency keeps a "nuclear file" on Iraq, and although its inspectors, who visit Tawatha every year, are unable to go anywhere else in Iraq, its officials say that it would be difficult for the Iraqis to get their hands on enriched uranium for a bomb. "Getting the right nuclear material, that's Iraq's problem," one official said

Whitehall advisers, however, are believed to underestimate the risk that the rest of the world faces if it waits for Saddam to achieve his goal. He may be several years away from completing his nuclear bomb programme, but if he were to acquire sufficient fissile material, the countdown to his nuclear dream could start much earlier

The dossier against a dictator

Nuclear weapons

1. President Bush's father, when he was in the White House, declared that the American bombing of Iraq's nuclear weapons sites had put Saddam Hussein out of the nuclear bomb building business for a long time to come. That was 11 years ago. Today, despite the systematic destruction by the International Atomic Energy Agency of Iraq's nuclear infrastructure, including 80,000 square metres of factory space, 2,000 pieces of equipment and 800 tons of special alloys, the CIA believes that Saddam has revived his programme and that his priority is to acquire a sufficient source of fissile material

2. Before the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was reported to be six months from making a crude nuclear device, based on an implosion design similar to the Nagasaki bomb. Two years ago the IAEA said that if Saddam started work again on a nuclear weapon, he could build one in about two years

3. In testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee in February, George Tenet, Director of US Central Intelligence, said: "We believe Saddam never abandoned his nuclear weapons programme. Iraq retains a sufficient number of nuclear scientists, programme documentation, and probably some quality manufacturing infrastructure that could support an invigorated nuclear weapons programme"

4. Intelligence agencies are monitoring any attempts by Saddam's agents to buy key components for rebuilding Iraq's uranium enrichment machinery; necessary for creating bomb grade nuclear material. In June Western intelligence agencies were warned that Iraq had acquired parts for "flow-forming" machines, which are used for producing components for uranium enrichment. However, Mr Tenet told the Intelligence Committee: "Our major concern is the possibility that Iraq

Chemical warfare

1. In the 1991 United Nations weapons inspectors have overseen the destruction of 80,000 litres of chemical warfare agents and 100,000 chemical warheads. However, according to intelligence assessments, much Iraqi chemical warfare capability remains intact

2. A report by the Pentagon last year said that Iraq had rebuilt its industrial and chemical production infrastructure in the Gulf War bombing in 1991 and the plans to build a chemical plant in the desert in December 1998

3. In February this year, George Tenet, the Director of US Central Intelligence, told the Senate: "Baghdad is expanding its civilian chemical industry, many of which could be converted quickly to CW chemical weapons production"

4. The UN special commissioner for Iraq, Hanssmann, reported in 1998 that Iraq was suspected of producing about 150,000 chemical munitions from his inspectors

5. While some reports have been made of Saddam's ability to produce an effective weapon system, others have pointed out that the Iraqis are still unable to produce a reliable chemical weapon

6. In 1998, the UN special commissioner for Iraq, Hanssmann, reported that Iraq was suspected of producing about 150,000 chemical munitions from his inspectors

Biological weapons

1. Saddam is believed to have a substantial stock of biological warfare agents and is researching different ways of "weaponising" them

2. Following revelations of Saddam's secret weapons of mass destruction programme made by Lieutenant-General Hussein Kamel, a son-in-law of the Iraqi leader who defected to the United States in 1995, Baghdad admitted for the first time that it had produced 30,000 litres of biological agents, including anthrax and botulinum toxins. Iraq claimed to have destroyed the agents

3. Before the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq produced four tons of VX nerve agent, 19,000 litres of botulinum toxin, 8,400 litres of anthrax spores and an unknown amount of sarin. However, the UN weapons inspectors believe that Iraq had failed to account for more than 7,000lb of growth media, obtained from European firms, which would be sufficient to produce huge quantities of bacteriological weapons

4. After the 1991 Gulf War, the inspectors found traces of anthrax in several warheads from long range al-Hussein ballistic missiles. About 200 air-launched biological bombs were also discovered

5. Iraq had carried out trials of a helicopter borne insecticide sprayer which could have been used for biological attacks. Anthony Cordesman, of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, wrote in a report in June that Iraq had continued to convert its Czech built L29 Dolphin jet trainer aircraft into unpiloted drones, possibly for delivering biological warfare agents

6. There are also fears that Iraq has developed large quantities of smallpox

Terrorism

1. Washington has strengthened its case for attacking Saddam by claiming links between Baghdad and al-Qaeda, the largest terrorist organisation

2. Despite continued scepticism from British intelligence services, it has been claimed that Muhammad Atta, one of the principal leaders of the September 11 attacks, met senior Iraqi intelligence officers in Baghdad in April last year, five months before the attacks. Although the meeting has never been confirmed, what is undisputed are the longstanding links between Saddam Hussein's security and intelligence apparatus and terrorist organisations

3. One of the fears expressed by the White House is that Saddam might use a proxy terrorist group, such as the extremist Palestinian organisation, to launch an attack against American or Israeli targets. The biological and chemical weapons programme Saddam has run for years acted as the inspiration for the Palestinian group, having 425,000 (that's 500) to the families of suicide bombers and 10,000 to the families of other Palestinian militants

4. There is also intelligence evidence that international terrorist groups have carried out training at a centre in Salman Pak, 60 miles from Baghdad. Salman Pak was one of the main biological weapons sites uncovered by the UN inspectors

5. Prior to the 1991 Gulf War there were fears in Britain that Saddam might send intelligence agents to London to recruit terrorist groups for an attack on the biological agents and special handling exercises were carried out to protect the threat

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