
From: David Kelly [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 June 2003 19 03
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Mobile lab story

[REDACTED]

Just back from a trip abroad The article fits in with my thoughts

Best wishes,

David

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 07 June 2003 12:48
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Mobile lab story

Doubtless you will have seen this, but in case not, I will paste below

I would be grateful for any additional insights you have and may try calling you later

Thanks much

June 7, 2003

Some Analysts of Iraq Trailers Reject Germ Use

By JUDITH MILLER and WILLIAM J BROAD

American and British intelligence analysts with direct access to the evidence are disputing claims that the mysterious trailers found in Iraq were for making deadly germs. In interviews over the last week, they said the mobile units were more likely intended for other purposes and charged that the evaluation process had been damaged by a rush to judgment.

"Everyone has wanted to find the 'smoking gun' so much that they may have wanted to have reached this conclusion," said one intelligence expert who has seen the trailers and, like some others, spoke on condition that he not be identified. He added, "I am very upset with the process."

The Bush administration has said the two trailers, which allied forces found in Iraq in April and May, are evidence that Saddam Hussein was hiding a program for biological warfare. In a white paper last week, it publicly detailed its case, even while concealing discrepancies in the evidence and a lack of hard proof.

Now, intelligence analysts stationed in the Middle East, as well as in the United States and Britain, are disclosing serious doubts about the administration's conclusions in what appears to be a bitter debate within the intelligence community. Skeptics said their initial judgments of a weapon application for the trailers had faltered as new evidence came to light.

Bill Harlow, a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency, said the dissenters "are entitled to their opinion, of course, but we stand behind the assertions in the white paper."

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In all, at least three teams of Western experts have now examined the trailers and evidence from them. While the first two groups to see the trailers were largely convinced that the vehicles were intended for the purpose of making germ agents, the third group of more senior analysts divided sharply over the function of the trailers, with several members expressing strong skepticism, some of the dissenters said.

In effect, early conclusions by agents on the ground that the trailers were indeed mobile units to produce germs for weapons have since been challenged.

"I have no great confidence that it's a fermenter," a senior analyst with long experience in unconventional arms said of a tank for multiplying seed germs into lethal swarms. The government's public report, he added, "was a rushed job and looks political." This analyst had not seen the trailers himself, but reviewed evidence from them.

The skeptical experts said the mobile plants lacked gear for steam sterilization, normally a prerequisite for any kind of biological production, peaceful or otherwise. Its lack of availability between production runs would threaten to let in germ contaminants, resulting in failed weapons.

Second, if this shortcoming were somehow circumvented, each unit would still produce only a relatively small amount of germ-laden liquid, which would have to undergo further processing at some other factory unit to make it concentrated and prepare it for use as a weapon.

Finally, they said, the trailers have no easy way for technicians to remove germ fluids from the processing tank.

Senior intelligence officials in Washington rebutted the skeptics, saying, for instance, that the Iraqis might have obtained the needed steam for sterilization from a separate supply truck.

The skeptics noted further that the mobile plants had a means of easily extracting gas. Iraqi scientists have said the trailers were used to produce hydrogen for weather balloons. While the white paper dismisses that as a cover story, some analysts see the Iraqi explanation as potentially credible.

A senior administration official conceded that "some analysts give the hydrogen claim more credence." But he asserted that the majority still linked the Iraqi trailers to germ weapons.

The depth of dissent is hard to gauge. Even if it turns out to be a minority view, which seems likely, the skepticism is significant given the image of consensus that Washington has projected and the political reliance the administration has come to place on the mobile units. At the recent summit meeting with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, President Bush cited the trailers as evidence of illegal Iraqi arms.

Critics seem likely to cite the internal dispute as further reason for an independent evaluation of the Iraqi trailers. Since the war's end, the White House has come under heavy political pressure because American soldiers have found no unconventional arms, a main rationale for the invasion of Iraq.

Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain, who also used Iraqi illicit weapons as a chief justification of the war, has been repeatedly attacked on this question in Parliament and outside it.

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Experts described the debate as intense despite the American intelligence agencies' release last week of the nuanced, carefully qualified white paper concluding that the mobile units were most likely part of Iraq's biowarfare program. It was posted May 28 on the Internet at www.cia.gov

"We are in full agreement on it," an official said of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency at a briefing on the white paper

The six-page report, "Iraqi Mobile Biological Warfare Agent Production Plants," called discovery of the trailers "the strongest evidence to date that Iraq was hiding a biological warfare program"

A senior administration official said the White House had not put pressure on the intelligence community in any way on the content of its white paper, or on the timing of its release.

In interviews, the intelligence analysts disputing its conclusions focused on the lack of steam sterilization gear for the central processing tank, which the white paper calls a fermenter for germ multiplication

In theory, the dissenting analysts added, the Iraqis could have sterilized the tank with harsh chemicals rather than steam. But they said that would require a heavy wash afterward with sterile water to remove any chemical residue - a feat judged difficult for a mobile unit presumably situated somewhere in the Iraqi desert

William C. Patrick III, a senior official in the germ warfare program that Washington renounced in 1969, said the lack of steam sterilization had caused him to question the germ-plant theory that he had once tentatively endorsed. "That's a huge minus," he said. "I don't see how you can clean those tanks chemically"

Three senior intelligence officials in Washington, responding to the criticisms during a group interview on Tuesday, said the Iraqis could have used a separate mobile unit to supply steam to the trailer. Some Iraqi decontamination units, they said, have such steam generators.

The officials also said some types of chemical sterilization were feasible without drastic follow-up actions

Finally, they proposed that the Iraqis might have engineered anthrax or other killer germs for immunity to antibiotics, and then riddled germ food in the trailers with such potent drugs. That, they said, would be a clever way to grow lethal bacteria and selectively decontaminate the equipment at the same time - though the officials conceded that they had no evidence the Iraqis had used such advanced techniques

On the second issue, the officials disputed the claim that the mobile units could make only small amounts of germ-laden liquids. If the trailers brewed up germs in high concentrations, they said, every month one truck could make enough raw material to fill five R-400 bombs

Finally, the officials countered the claim that the trailers had no easy way for technicians to drain germ concoctions from the processing tank. The fluids could go down a pipe at its bottom, they said. While the pipe is small in diameter - too small to work effectively, some analysts hold - the officials said high pressure from an air compressor on the trailer could force the tank to drain in 10 or 20 minutes.

A senior official said "we've considered these objections" and dismissed them as having no bearing on the

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overall conclusions
of the white paper He added that Iraq, which declared several classes of mobile vehicles to the United Nations, never said anything about hydrogen factories

Some doubters noted that the intelligence community was still scrambling to analyze the trailers, suggesting that the white paper may have been premature. They said laboratories in the Middle East and the United States were now analyzing more than 100 samples from the trailers to verify the intelligence findings. Allied forces, they noted, have so far failed to find any of the envisioned support vehicles that the trailers would need to produce biological weapons

One skeptic questioned the practicality of some of the conjectural steps the Iraqis are envisioned as having taken to adapt the trailers to the job of making deadly germs

"It's not built and designed as a standard fermenter," he said of the central tank. "Certainly, if you modify it enough you could use it. But that's true of any tin can."

The reporting for this article was carried out by Judith Miller in Iraq and Kuwait and by William Broad in New York. Her agreement with the Pentagon, for an "embedded" assignment, allowed the military to review her copy to prevent breaches of troop protection and security. No changes were made in the review.