

Copyright 2002 Guardian Newspapers Limited
The **Guardian** (London)

September 25, 2002

SECTION: Guardian Home Pages, Pg. 2

LENGTH: 888 words

HEADLINE: Iraq **Dossier:** Suspect plants open their doors: Target sites Iraqis arrange tour of factories named in report

BYLINE: Ewen MacAskill in the al-Qa'qa weapons site, Iraq

BODY:

With bright yellow smoke pouring from a chimney behind him, Sinan Rasim Said stood in the middle of Iraq's biggest explosives site and rejected accusations in Tony Blair's **dossier** that he was possibly engaged in the production of nerve gas.

Mr Said, director-general of the al-Qa'qa military industrial complex, near Baghdad, said that at least one of the chemical warfare allegations in relation to his plant was easily refutable: "It is a pretty stupid mistake for the British to make."

He expected to be bombed anyway: "The way the Americans are talking, they are very aggressive. They need a war always." He and his staff of more than 1,000 would remain on the site to try to fight fires and protect equipment.

The site was one of two visited by British journalists within hours of Mr Blair's **dossier** being published. The deputy prime minister of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, said British journalists in Baghdad could visit any part of any site mentioned in the report. That promise was fulfilled yesterday.

The journalists chose two sites which have never been visited by Western media before: al-Qa'qa and the Amariyah Sera and Vaccine Institute, which is in a Baghdad suburb. The latter, accused of involvement in biological warfare, also disputed the allegations made in Mr Blair's report.

Both sites will be high on the list to be visited by UN inspectors, who are due to return to Iraq next month.

At the entrance to al-Qa'qa, south of Baghdad, which covers 26 square kilometres, is a slogan: "The heroes of military production say yes to Saddam Hussein."

Al-Qa'qa produces almost all the explosives and propellant fuel for the Iraqi military: this is allowed under the terms of the UN ceasefire agreement at the end of the 1991 Gulf war.

But that same ceasefire resolution bans Iraq from producing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

Al-Qa'qa was bombed in 1991 and again in 1998. Mr Blair's **dossier**, based mainly on intelligence assessments, said that parts of the plant were operational. "Of particular concern are elements of the phosgene production plant at al-Qa'qa. These were severely damaged during the Gulf war and dismantled under UN supervision (the UN weapons inspectors, now called Unmovic) supervision, but have since been rebuilt. While phosgene does have industrial uses, it can also be used by itself as a chemical agent or as a precursor for nerve agent."

MEJ/5/0001

Mr Said, an engineer, took journalists to the phosgene reactor. He said it was used to make centralit, which stabilises gunpowder, and stated that Iraq was permitted by the UN to make it. The byproduct of centralit is phosgene, but he said that remained trapped inside the pipes and could not be removed.

He said the reactor had been bombed in 1991 but, contrary to Mr Blair's report, Unscm had not dismantled it. The inspectors regarded the reactor as having a legitimate military use and supervised the rebuilding process, he added.

He expected the inspectors to visit the site, as they often did before they left in December 1998. "Why should I be worried about their return? It was their choice to leave. We have no problem with their return."

The entrance to the Amariyah plant, a smaller-scale operation with a staff of 140, has no military guards, as might have been expected of a place storing biological weapons. It is rundown, its laboratories near empty, and the staff, in dirty white lab gowns, looked bored. Rubbish was piled high outside, especially empty bottles. Among it was a cardboard box from Technical Treatments Ltd, Sevenoaks, Kent, dated 10/11/97, with "polythene bottles" stamped on it.

The Iraqis claim the plant is used to make vaccines for typhoid, snake bites, hepatitis and meningitis. There was a strong smell of urine, and of the animals used for tests.

The journalists were accompanied by Mazin Zakaria, a director of Iraq's monitoring unit, which dealt with inspectors before and will deal with them again. He said Amariyah had been visited almost weekly by the UN team between 1994 and 1998.

The **dossier** said Amariyah was one of three "facilities of concern" for the production of biological weapons: Iraq is accused of making anthrax, ricin, botulinum toxin and aflatoxins.

It added: "Unscm established that this facility was used to store biological agents, seed stocks and conduct biological warfare associated genetic research prior to the Gulf war. It has now expanded its storage capacity."

Karim Obeid, director of the institute, disputed that Unscm had "established" anything and said the organisation would confirm this.

But an Unmovic spokesman said last night that the Iraqis had previously acknowledged using the facility to store biological weapons: "The Iraqis told Unscm that vials, testing quantities of the seed stocks for biological weapons agents, were stored there."

Mr Obeid confirmed that storage capacity had been expanded and took journalists to the new building, which was lined with empty, defrosted fridges. Mr Obeid said the intention had been to use the extra space for blood analysis machines but the work stopped for financial reasons.

He said he had no fears about the inspectors' arrival because "this is only a medical plant and any expert in the medical field can see quickly that that is all it is".

LOAD-DATE: September 25, 2002

Your use of this service is governed by [Terms and Conditions](#). Please review them
Copyright ©2003 LexisNexis Group a division of Reed Elsevier (UK) Ltd. All rights reserved

MTD / 5/0002