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THE SMOKING GUN DID NOT GO UP IN SMOKE

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Ever since Tony Blair's speech before the two Houses of Congress on July 17, 2003, where he conceded that "history would forgive him and President Bush even if no weapons of mass destruction are found in Iraq", those who opposed the war, in the US and Britain in particular, and elsewhere in general, have been "celebrating", as if the war has been in vain or as if there were no tyranny that was removed or terrorism that was battled. But this celebration seems premature, to say the least, not only because the search continues for WMD and vast possibilities still exist to find them, but also because there is so much evidence of their existence, in the past if not in the present, that there should be no doubt about the validity of the Allied claims, or the veracity of a "smoking gun". Evidence is indeed overwhelming and it should be gleaned in the following domains:

1. Since the 1980s, Saddam Hussein – personally – has boasted, in public, of the development by his scientists of "binary" weapons of mass destruction, which presumably contain both chemical and biological weapons. He has threatened to use them to "burn half Israel". Others, such as the Egyptians in the 1960s, used WMD in their wars (in Yemen), but denied the fact or at least tried to hide it. Saddam was one of the few tyrants in history who threatened to use them, and backed his menace by actually manufacturing the deadly substances;
2. Saddam used both chemical and biological weapons against the Iranians in the First Gulf War (1980-1988) and the Kurds in Halabja in 1988. This means that even if Saddam had no weapons on the eve of the Third War (2003), there is no denying that he had them in the past;
3. Saddam himself had reported to the investigative team of the UN, under Hans Blix, that during the months leading up to the war, he had certain quantities of biological and chemical weapons which he destroyed; but he provided no evidence or documentation of that destruction. In other words, while there is an Iraqi admission of past existence of those weapons, there is no proof that they were discarded;
4. Enough foreign companies, notably German, were caught trading in chemical substances with Iraq, which could provide the basis for the manufacture of WMD;
5. In the 1980s, Saddam made tremendous efforts to develop missiles and a long-range "giant cannon", with the help of a Belgian scientist, which would be worthwhile developing only if it had WMD payloads to deliver;
6. In June 1981, when Israel destroyed Saddam's nuclear project at Osirak, it was widely known that the site was geared to produce nuclear weapons. (This project was a joint program with the French, in fact, at the time, people referred to the project as O-Chirac, referring to Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, who under President Giscard d'Estaing, initiated the deal with Saddam.) Further evidence to this transpired over the years when Saddam's agents attempted to smuggle parts that are essential for the production of nuclear arms out of the US and western European countries;

7. Prior to the Third Gulf War, an impressive body of evidence had been gleaned by British, American and Israeli intelligence, and most of it was presented by Secretary Powell to the Security Council;
8. During the war, widespread reporting was done in the American press, by independent investigative reporters, who have accumulated a massive amount of evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, regarding the manufacturing of WMD. It is unconceivable that so many hiding places and secret sites, so many Iraqis who were banned from certain areas and so many restrictions around certain military camps, should all be part of some inconsequential game of no importance;
9. UN inspectors, notably Mr. Butler the Australian Chief Inspector, who visited sites throughout Iraq, have counseled us to learn from what the Iraqis tried to withhold from them, and from the obstacles they put before UN investigators, more than from the information they yielded under duress; there must have been something to the fact that the UN inspectors were prevented by force, or under threat of force, more than once, from accessing certain places that they suspected, and only after certain delays during which the Iraqis cleaned up the incriminating substances, were the inspections permitted to proceed; such rows with UN teams would have been avoided if the Iraqis had nothing to hide;
10. Scientists tell us that while nuclear weapons or facilities are difficult to hide, it is possible to conceal biological and chemical weapons, and that even if under duress the Iraqis destroyed the stocks they had of those deadly weapons, they certainly preserved their capacity to manufacture new ones at will;
11. The US has set up special teams to search for WMD throughout Iraq, whose work might take many years; but in the meantime they have found many barrels of chemical substances, suspiciously hidden or buried underground. Even if these do not constitute the “smoking gun”, they are nevertheless a vital step before it. The teams also found what seemed like mobile laboratories which could manufacture WMD. No one has provided as yet any plausible alternative explanation to their existence in the middle of nowhere, but that they were hidden away to wipe out any indicting evidence;
12. The clear possibility exists that during the months leading up to the war, Saddam had ample opportunity to conclude cooperation deals with other Arab and Islamic countries, headed by like-minded corrupt tyrants, like those of Syria, Iran, Pakistan or Libya, who for a hefty bribe, in cash or smuggled petrol, would not shrink from helping a fellow-dictator in trouble. One has to remember that since the end of the 1990s, for example, Iraq and Syria so intimately rallied to each other as to permit that huge smuggling of Iraqi oil abroad, even as Syria was made a member of the Security Council of the UN which prohibited that illicit export;
13. No one is certain that Pakistan had developed an effective nuclear weapon until it tested it in the open, and no one knew Saddam’s whereabouts until he was caught. But no one denied the existence of either the bomb or Saddam. It is absurd to seek a negative proof for anything in the fact that one does not know, does not understand or does not find something. For the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Rather, when no conclusive evidence in the form of a smoking gun exists for now, overwhelming circumstantial evidence to its existence, especially when we know that it was used in the past, should be sufficient to send shudders down our backs and prompt us to act, the public conclusions of various investigative committees notwithstanding.

In mid-December 2002, weapons experts in one facility inspected by the UN were replaced by Iraqi intelligence agents who were to deceive inspectors about the work that was being done there. On orders from Saddam, the Iraqis issued a false death certificate for one scientist who was sent into hiding, so that he could not be interrogated by the inspectors; in mid-January 2003, experts at one facility that was related to WMD, had been ordered to stay at home away from work, to avoid the inspectors. Workers from other facilities not engaged in unconventional weapons, were to replace the absent workers; and a dozen Iraqi experts were placed under home arrest, not in their homes, but as a group in one of Saddam's guest houses. This is not the expected behavior of someone who has nothing to hide. Had the Iraqis been invited to the Security Council and allowed to be interrogated under oath, as in a court of law, it is doubtful that any one of them could withstand the interrogatory unscathed.

The examples cited by the Secretary of State at the Security Council gave ample indication to the systematic effort made by the Iraqis to keep key materials and people from the inspectors. This was not merely a lack of cooperation, but a patent campaign to sabotage any meaningful inspection work. This should not be surprising since Saddam had specialized in that sort of misleading over the years of inspection (1991-1998), and it was precisely due to those tactics that the entire operation came to a halt (1998-2003), under the "arrangement" which the UN Secretary General had reached with Saddam Hussein, which, in fact, relieved Saddam from inspection. Little wonder then, that the UN Secretary was not the most vocal advocate of resuming inspections until they were enforced by the US demand, nor was he in favor of exposing Iraqi lies, which would have also exposed the hoax of his "understanding" with Saddam.

In the field of biological weapons, it had taken four years for the UN inspectors to pry an admission by Iraq that it had this kind of weapon. When they finally admitted having biological weapons in its arsenal in 1995, there were vast quantities, which meant that while denying their existence, the Iraqis were hard at work producing and storing them. Iraq declared 8,500 liters of anthrax, while UNSCOM estimated that three times this amount may have been manufactured. A teaspoon of anthrax killed two postal workers in the US and forced the US Senate to close down in the fall of 2001. Moreover, the Iraqis have never accounted for all the biological weapons they admitted they did have, nor for the 400 weapons they had filled with those substances. UN inspectors could not determine what happened to those weapons, although American intelligence had amassed information about the continued manufacture of those weapons in the years since the inspectors were expelled by Saddam in 1998.

One of the most worrisome aspects of these weapons was the existence of mobile facilities of production, either on wheels or on rail. The trucks and train cars were designed to evade detection, once again not fitting for a government who has nothing to hide. In any case, those mobile facilities could have manufactured enough biological agents to surpass anything the Iraqis had prior to 1990. In 2000, a defecting Iraqi chemical engineer, who supervised one of those facilities, gave evidence of the production of biological weapons and of an accident which killed 12 technicians on the site. He testified that production of those agents always started Thursdays at midnight, because the Iraqis thought the inspectors would not work on the Muslim holy day of Friday. The production, which could not be stopped in the middle, went on until Friday evening, when the inspectors were likely to show up again. These descriptions were corroborated by other independent Iraqi sources, to the point that they were known to American intelligence in great technical detail. Those trucks, cars or trailers, could be easily concealed because they did not look any different than ordinary vehicles in those categories which could merge into the environment without raising any suspicions. Indeed,

during the Iraq war, even though many suspected vehicles of that sort were detected by special teams, they were hard to differentiate from others. In all, 18 mobile production units were available to the Iraqi manufacturing of WMD, which could churn out enough biological agents in one month (anthrax, ricin, aflatoxin and botulinum toxin) to kill many thousands of people. By 1998, the UN Inspectors had concluded that the Iraqis had so perfected the dry version of these agents, which is the most lethal, that it was incorporated into the mobile units.

As to chemical weapons, UNSCOM had widely documented their development and manufacture, and one needs no better proof of their existence and of Saddam's readiness to use them than the fact that he had employed them in the war against Iran and against his own people in Halabja in 1988, causing the horrendous deaths of thousands, which was of little concern to those who then blocked the Security Council Resolution that Powell was striving to table. Saddam has also never accounted for the thousands of shells and bombs filled with mustard gas and other lethal chemical agents that were known to exist in Saddam's arsenal.

Only after the defection of Hussein Kamel, the late son-in-law of Saddam, did Iraq acknowledge possession of four tons of VX nerve gas, one drop of which on the skin is sufficient to kill in minutes. UNSCOM collected forensic evidence that Iraq had not only produced VX but also weaponized it by putting it in weapons of delivery. To escape scrutiny, Iraq had embedded much of its illicit weapons industry into its other civilian chemical plants, and this dual-use production can be turned back and forth from civilian to military use in no time. These plants were built to undergo any inspection and to appear innocent, even though they were not. This is one of the reasons the UN inspectors who have visited some of those plants could not come up with any indicting findings.

Satellite photos, made as late as May 2002, showed unusual activity at the al-Musayyib complex where Iraq transshipped its chemical products into weapons and then distributed them to their hiding places. Another photo of the same site taken two months later, showed that the ground had been bulldozed and graded, which indicated that the Iraqis had removed the crust of the earth in order to conceal evidence of chemical weapons that would be extant from years of chemical weapons' activity.

Iraq ran an international network of clandestine procurement to purchase vital parts and substances for its WMD program, which can serve only that purpose, such as: filters which separate micro-organisms, toxins used in biological weapons, equipment to concentrate the agent, growth media for anthrax and botulinum toxin, sterilization equipment for laboratories, glass-lined reactors and pumps that can handle corrosive chemical agents, large amounts of thionyl chloride, a precursor for nerve and blister agents and other substances. Even if Iraq were to explain that it needed all those substances for its legitimate chemical production, it would have to explain why it hid them from the Inspectors, and it took a tremendous intelligence effort, human and electronic, including eavesdropping on senior Iraqi commanders who attested to the existence of nerve gas, to dig them up. By American estimates, the Iraqis had hundreds of tons of chemical agents, enough to fill thousands of weapons to cause widespread death. Saddam had given his field commanders the authorization to use those weapons under certain circumstances, in itself evidence of their existence and of his intention to use them. Since the 1980s, Saddam's regime had been experimenting on humans to perfect his biological and chemical weapons. 1,600 death-row prisoners were transferred in 1995 to a special unit for such experiments. Eye witnesses saw those prisoners tied to beds while those horrific tests were done on them, and then autopsies were performed to evaluate the efficacy of the products.

Regarding Iraq's nuclear capacity, which Saddam not only had never abandoned but remained determined to advance, the US provided plenty of proof. The Inspectors had looked since 1991 for elements of this nuclear program but found nothing. In fact, Hussein had a massive clandestine nuclear program. That it was not discovered by UN teams only goes to show his ability to conceal it. It covered various techniques to enrich uranium (electromagnetic isotope separation, gas centrifuge and gas diffusion), which must have cost him billions of dollars while he was telling UN supervisory boards that he had no nuclear ambitions. Iraq already possessed two out of the three elements needed for nuclear weapons: a cadre of expert scientists, and a bomb design. Since 1998 he had been centering on the acquisition of the third element, which is fissile material, namely the ability to enrich uranium. He acquired tubes from different countries, which could be used for centrifuges for enriching uranium and were supposed to be under control by their manufacturers. While American experts have identified those tubes as rotors for the centrifuges, the Iraqis claimed that they were to be used for the bodies of rockets, in multiple rocket-launchers, something quite puzzling because their tolerance far exceeds what is the accepted standard in the American weapon industry. The Iraqis were also making efforts to acquire other parts of equipment that could be used to build gas centrifuges, which in the aggregate amount to proving Iraq's ambition to manufacture fissile material which is the missing link for renewing its nuclear program. The nuclear scientists' cadre, whom the press openly called the "nuclear *mujahideen*", were regularly praised and exhorted for their efforts, and they gained the personal attention of the tyrant.

In addition to the lethal weapons of mass destruction, Iraq also developed means to deliver them, especially ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The means of delivery, which are too expensive to deliver conventional payloads, are in themselves conclusive proof that the Iraqis were developing unconventional weapons, even if we knew nothing about nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Before 1990, Iraq had developed many such missiles, which struck its neighbors – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel, and were being developed to attain farther ranges. The fact that they were all loaded with conventional payloads only meant that the Iraqis were testing them live in preparation for the day they acquired non-conventional capability; they could certainly have loaded them at the very least with biological and chemical weapons they possessed then, but they knew that a devastating counter-blow by the Americans or the Israelis would leave them crippled for generations and put an end to their program before it could mature. Despite the fact that the UN inspectors destroyed most of Saddam's missile capacity, he retained a few dozen of them with the range of up to 1,000 km. The Iraqis themselves admitted that the two types of missiles they developed, "al-Sumud" and "al-Fatah", violated the 150 km. limit established by the Security Council. Moreover, the Iraqis had illegally imported 380 SA-2 rocket engines, for the development of the advanced rockets it was not supposed to have. Ample graphic and photographic evidence was shown by Secretary Powell to prove that the Iraqis were developing over 1,200 km.-range missiles that are forbidden by the UN resolutions and patently put in jeopardy Iraq's neighbors, because of their capacity to deliver unconventional weapons to each one of their major cities.

The UAVs have no other purpose than to carry and deliver unconventional payloads. Spray devices have been developed to attain greater efficiency in distributing the lethal substances over large enemy areas. These UAVs have been fitted on Mig 21 Soviet aircraft, but Iraq had also been developing smaller vehicles for that purpose, called L-29. While Iraq had declared this vehicle to have a range of 80 km., US intelligence discovered that in its test flights it covered a range of 500 km., without refueling and on autopilot, which renders it quite lethal to Iraq's neighbors.¹

Any independent judicial system in the world, who would acquit a culprit due to the “insufficiency” of all the above massive evidence, direct and circumstantial, would not be worthy of that attribute. But the Security Council, with its conflicting interests and political considerations, the hypocrisy and fallacy that drip from its deliberations, and the atmosphere of vindictiveness and lack of concern for truth or fairness, certainly cannot compete for the attributes of a court of law in a liberal democracy. If tyrannical countries like Syria and China, and until recently the Soviet Union, can dominate its debates, then what can one expect? Incidentally, the same kind of overwhelming evidence was presented by Secretary Powell to the Security Council on the same occasion, with regard to the links between Iraq and international terrorism in general, and *al Qaeda* in particular, but since it is neither graphic or photographic but human by nature, where the US could be accused of manipulation, it is perhaps preferable to cite other sources for it. Other sources exist, however, in the domain of unconventional weapons too, of whom we shall cite only the most telling, all of which largely corroborate Powell’s accusations at the Security Council. Like him, we shall distinguish, for the sake of the presentation, between nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and the means of delivery, which in themselves attest to the existence of WMD, exactly as a Trident-carrying Submarine in the American Navy, which could deliver inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM) to all corners of the globe, was proof

- a) to the existence in the Navy of nuclear-powered subs, which could deliver their payloads from under water and stay indefinitely at sea only if they were nuclear-powered;
- b) they must have carried ICBMs, because only that sort of missile justified the very onerous vehicle which carried them;
- c) that the ICBMs would not be worth dispatching if they were not nuclear (or biological or chemical), because to deliver one ton of regular explosives to the target would not be worth the expensive missile and the onerous vehicle that carried them; and
- d) to increase the cost effectiveness of the Trident, it had to be multi-head, so that the same expensive missile, carried by the same expensive submarine, could hit several targets in one shot.

The very same logic applies to Saddam’s arsenals, and therefore Powell’s analysis, not only as a Secretary of State, known for his sobriety and integrity, but also as a former trooper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not particularly known for his belligerency or unfairness, should be heeded by any open-minded observer.

Equipped with the knowledge that was laid out before the Security Council (in which every bit represented the working assumptions of Tommy Franks’ troops), as soon as the American forces crossed into Iraqi territory they were on WMD alert, with specialized units of detection, protection and de-contamination accompanying every fighting unit. There were places and times where the troops in their entirety were on high alert, and despite the crippling effect of the suffocating anti-WMD suits and masks, they wore them. That was particularly the case in the approaches of Baghdad, when the Americans were convinced that in his last stand Saddam would deploy everything he had envisaged for his doomsday confrontation with the Americans.² But that did not happen, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of the existence of those horrific means of warfare in Iraqi hands and of the earlier indications that the Iraqis would use them, at least as a last resort. Saddam’s authorization to his supreme commanders to use these weapons, were picked up by Intelligence (not only the Americans’). Various explanations are possible (not to their non-existence because they certainly existed), but to their non-use, because they were certainly not used in the Third Gulf

War. The most common explanation is that the American moves were so swift and overwhelming, and always several steps ahead of the Iraqi field commanders, who never had the chance to evaluate the right time and place to use them. Add to that the disarray and collapsing systems of command and control under the American bombings, and you have a plausible reason why the Iraqis should have abstained from that disastrous move. But this explanation misses the long and elaborate preparations made by the Iraqi military prior to the American attack that they knew was coming and made tremendous efforts to avoid.

Another explanation is that Saddam's decision not to use WMD stemmed from his reluctance to lose face in front of the whole world, after he had reiterated that he did not possess them. The US insisted that Saddam had WMD, while he swore that he did not, and the UN assured the world that "there was no decisive evidence" to sustain the American claim. Saddam was not reluctant to be caught lying, a practice in which he had gained considerable expertise, but he did not want to be seen losing his argument with the Americans, thereby justifying their war against him. This argument also misses the whole rationale for the stockpiling of such weapons for a rainy day or for an immediate and tangible danger to the elimination of the regime. It is hard to imagine Iraq once again coming so close to a doomsday scenario in the future as it did in this war; and despite this, Iraq did not use these weapons.

Yet another explanation is that Saddam prepared those weapons only for self-defense, not for offense, and knowing that if he should use them against his enemies at war, Americans or others, his country and people, not to speak about his regime, his cronies and his family, would suffer such an untold devastation in retribution, that it would not be worthwhile to take the risk. If so, why did he need those weapons when there was no one remotely threatening him with such weapons? Except for Egypt, which used chemical weapons in the Yemen in the 1960s, there is no record of the use of chemical warfare since World War I, except by Saddam. Besides, if he needed those weapons only in self-defense, why did he use them against the Kurds in 1988?

The only plausible explanation is a combination of all the others: Saddam had plenty of WMD, which he built to use to attain his megalomaniac ambitions, both against factions of his people and his neighbors. Some of the latter also have them, but few would dare or have the guts, like Saddam, to use them and defy the whole world which needs his oil. He, nevertheless came to the conclusion in the months building up to the war, that rather than vindicate the US and the Inspectors who would ultimately find indicting proof of their existence, he would systematically eliminate any signs of their presence on his soil. An elaborate program of concealment was undertaken, matched only by the ongoing underground manufacturing of those substances. Whatever could be buried under the ground in the vast Iraqi desert, together with the large manufacturing facilities that existed there already since inspection started, "disappeared" in that fashion; whatever could be dissimulated as civilian-use substances, was metamorphosed to appear innocent; what could be stored in neighboring friendly countries, such as Syria and Jordan, and for a price even Iran and Saudi Arabia, was hauled there; what could fit in neither, may have been shipped overseas to places like Sudan, Libya, or some other mysterious ally, for a high price; and what could not find its way to any of those destinations, was simply destroyed in place. The destruction of missiles to satisfy UN inspectors in the weeks prior to the war, was an example of that, another was the new top soil shown by Powell to the members of the Security Council, which was to cover over the contaminated earth in one of the bases of those WMDs. Another long trail of evidence in this direction can be gleaned from the pieces of information that have been published along the way since the war broke out.

Indeed, together with intelligence reports that Saddam was ready to use gas against the Americans once they completed their conquest of the Shi`ite south, there were press reports that the Americans had inspected a suspected chemical plant near Najaf, which may have undergone the civilian metamorphosis, but found nothing. However, noting that Iraqi soldiers in the battlefield or in POW camps were carrying masks with them, and knowing that the US would certainly not use that horrific form of warfare, reporters came to the conclusion that the Iraqis themselves must have prepared for their own forces to use gas or other chemical or biological means in the field. American fears of such an eventuality were so concrete that American and Australian Special Forces were flown into Iraq to seize control of Iraqi command and control posts. Such "Chemical Ali"s (named after one of Saddam's relatives, called Ali, nicknamed "Chemical Ali" because he was in charge of all WMD projects in Iraq) in southern Iraq, that were connected to what they thought were chemical weapons sites. On a previous occasion, President Bush had elaborated on his description of the Halabja horror, in which an estimated 8,000 Kurds, mostly women and children perished, 15 years earlier, in his weekly radio talk. He must have known, or feared some warning that was not revealed in public.³

On March 26, barely at the end of the first week of fighting, the Americans ran across that huge three square mile compound, near Najaf, some 100 miles south of the Capital. Of particular interest was the information provided by an Iraqi General, 30 officers, and another 300 POWs who surrendered to the Americans. Some of these prisoners were whisked away for interrogation before the troops of the 3rd Infantry (who occupied the grounds) had a chance to question them about the stunning findings on the ground. The General himself claimed that he had nothing to do with unconventional weapons, but admitted that there were special bunkers and underground tunnels in the compound that neither he nor other senior officers could enter. What was there to hide from senior officers; dollars or gold that Saddam stacked there? But then, that was hardly a suitable place, in the heart of the desert, if Saddam needed the money close to his palaces in the Capital, both for access and for escape. Were these secret harems of Saddam? But then, the same problems apply. What could be there that senior officers in the middle of nowhere could not access? Surely something Saddam needed to hide. And that amount of personnel and senior officers? Was it a base manned by sinecures, or just a blunt case of mismanagement? Since the site was probably emptied by Saddam just prior to the arrival of the Americans, in the course of some dark night when the convoys of evacuation could not be spotted from satellite, one must look for bits and pieces, for scraps of evidence that may have been left behind by negligent evacuees, and like a detective, piece them together, analyze them, and provide a plausible plot. When a team of the 75th Exploitation Task Force (XTF), made out of technicians of various disciplines and Special Forces, arrived to that site, they found a biological hazard sign on a wooden pallet with a crate in bunker No 36, and markings on other crates in bunker No. 37 indicating CN-1, which is sometimes used for riot control agents. Since there was no one in sight to control and riots are unlikely to happen in a secret military camp, we remain with the possibility that either that substance was implanted to make the place look innocent, or that it was of a dual purpose like other agents in Saddam's chemical industry.⁴

Signs of that sort are not usually found in beauty parlors or in kindergartens, though with Saddam one never knows. The team also found artillery shells coated with wax, which is sometimes used on shells and bombs containing unconventional weapons. They also stumbled across 40 advanced Soviet-style masks with extra filters, which attest that the personnel there dealt with WMD, or at the very least were expecting an American gas attack. Hydraulic triple-locked doors barred the entrance to some of the more than 100 bunkers on the site, protected by electric fences and trenches. Certainly, no weapons of mass destruction were

found there, but one has to explain what hid behind those doors conducting to tunnels in the middle of the desert and surrounded by top security defensive devices. Stores of toys and candies? A secret school for nurses? A hidden HQ for Mother Teresa? That site was initially on the list of suspected locations for manufacturing and storing WMD, and it was due to be visited by Pentagon experts, but until a conclusive analysis of the findings there and elsewhere was put together, no smoking gun could be said to have been found.⁵ Another team headed by a captain, the Mobile Exploitation Team Bravo (MET-Bravo) rummaged through a vast Iraqi air-base at Talil in the south which looked abandoned, and its runways littered with war debris, pieces of planes and vehicles, as if someone made an effort to present it as an innocent site, where mammoth quantities of weapons and ammunition, some from World War II, had been amassed haphazardly and left behind, without the slightest attempt to tamper with the ammunition so as not to let it fall in enemy hands. That base had been heavily bombed by the Americans during the previous Gulf War, and was on the list of suspected sites too, but according to the captain, “there was not any apparent rhyme or reason to the storage. Shells were mixed in with casings, fuses and mortar, piled high from floor to ceiling. It was all a jumble”.⁶ Isn't it plausible to advance the hypothesis that it was not an ammunition depot that the Americans found, but a carefully staged one to make believe that Iraq was clean of WMD, and that once the war is over, and the Americans forced to leave, under the criticism or world opinion and the unrelenting attacks of his own guerillas that he withdrew from Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk, almost without a fight, Saddam would be able to stage a comeback and repatriate or unearth all the hidden goodies?

As the Americans failed to find any unconventional weapons along the way, they continued to be convinced that Baghdad would have to use them, as their last opportunity. Had the Iraqis learned the lessons of the weapons dumps that had been cleaned up and deserted prior to the arrival of the Americans, they may have known that Saddam had adopted a novel tactic of preserving what he could of his army and unconventional arsenals. For this purpose, Saddam would avoid combat and begin harassing the occupying troops only after the war was over and no WMDs were found. The Americans estimated, instead, that the withdrawing Iraqis would now use the weapons defensively, namely that they would use chemical agents to contaminate land, in order to create a no-man's land between them and the attacking troops. But that did not happen, for Saddam would have had to betray his vow not to vindicate the Americans and let the world believe that the attack was in vain and had no justification in the first place. The American assumption was based on the experience of the First Gulf War (1980-8), where the Iraqis laid down mustard gas behind the Iranian forces, then bombarded the front lines with the short-lived but highly toxic sarin gas. The goal was to drive the retreating sarin-exposed Iraqis into the mustard trap, and the Americans were afraid that the same tactic might be repeated against them to create killing zones around them as they approached Baghdad. Iraq is not a signatory of the Chemical weapons Convention of 1993, that was signed by 150 countries, including the US, and that increased the suspicions of the Americans who were kept guessing by Saddam from day one of the war.⁷

Two weeks into the war, the Americans had explored a dozen of the several hundred suspected sites, but still no smoking gun, the official explanation being that most of the suspected locations were still under Iraqi control, in the Baghdad and Tikrit areas, and that after America took over the entire territory the search would be pushed forward in earnest. Meanwhile, at an industrial plant in Latifiya south of Baghdad, the troops found thousands of boxes of white powder, suspected to be a chemical agent, but it was identified as regular explosives. The 75th XTF, much to the frustration of its members, found itself training in northern Iraq rather than making headway in the investigations they had come for, while the American Administration, instead of providing plausible explanations to the so-far evasive

WMD, were losing faith in their pre-war determination that finding and destroying those weapons were top priority, second only to removing Saddam, and were now talking about restoring civil rights to Iraq, building a democracy and destroying the infrastructure of terrorism in the country. But they still maintained their faith, at least when asked in public, that when they got to Baghdad those sites would be uncovered one by one. The media, on their part, far from investing some investigative reporting to answer the quandary, started reporting that the fact that only masks and protection suits were uncovered in the Iraqi sites meant that the Iraqis had no offensive unconventional weapons, and all they did in the chemical and biological domain was to provide protection for their troops. All the other questions, like who manufactured and used gas against Iranians and Kurds, became taboo in their eyes and no one wanted to talk about them anymore, least of all the Administration, which was embarrassed by the questions of reporters and never again volunteered to make statements on this issue unless asked.⁸ The vanishing of the American forceful accusation against Baghdad on the use of WMD, which incidentally did not affect Tony Blair in the least, generated a perverse accusation in reverse against the Americans for having authorized the use of tear gas against rioters in Iraq, precisely in order to avert the use of live fire to quell disturbances. The new accusations voiced in the press and by all kinds of experts and intellectuals, said that America, who is a signatory to the Convention against chemical weapons, would be violating its signature; tear gas being included among the prohibited substances against armed forces. However, there exists in the American legal system, an executive order from 1975, which has since become American national policy, as adopted by the Senate of the US, which has allowed tear gas for certain defensive purposes. The Chemical Weapons Convention had banned tear gas against armed forces for fear that it might escalate to the use of other chemical agents, but that was clearly not the case here. At any rate, opponents of the war saw this as an opportunity not only to clear Iraq of any blame, despite the fact that it did not join the Convention, but to unfairly and carelessly reverse the blame against the US, in spite of the fact that the US had joined the convention. Moreover, one of those experts claimed, that if the Americans used tear gas in the war, the Iraqis would be entitled to retaliate with chemical weapons of their own, in self-defense.⁹ Absurdity had made a full circle.

In the Karbalah area, while the Americans were searching an empty (once again!) military camp, where Palestinians and other foreign volunteers were supposedly trained, they found several drums which they thought may contain deadly nerve agents and mustard gas. They duly warned that many industrial chemicals can cause false alarms; therefore they reserved their final judgment until the 75th XTF could test the findings. The American troops discovered on the site, once again, an unusually large amount of chemical protection gear, but instead of the weapons they were searching for they found those canisters of chemicals. Some soldiers became ill, probably due to auto-suggestion, and they put on their chemical protection suits. The chemical unit that tested the substance identified it as CN, a riot control gas that caused vomiting and blisters, and when they later tested a 20-gallon drum they identified it as sarin and tabun, two nerve agents. Another 55-gallon drum was said to have tested positive for mustard gas. But those suspected materials were not packaged into warheads or artillery shells, something which should have raised suspicions as to their lethal effect.¹⁰ However, based on previous experiences where all those alarms proved false, this time reporters were extremely prudent, qualifying their writing with “possible” and “may”. Some reporters even warned that tests in the field can be inexact, and they appealed for patience before final conclusions were drawn, because the kits for preliminary testing were designed to err on the caution side, while the large and precise instruments – the gas chromatograph and the mass spectrometer, which break up the chemicals into their

components and then compare them to libraries of known substances, are too large and too complex to be placed in the field. The immediate analysis with the field kits can confuse nerve agents with other chemicals such as insecticides, for in fact tabun and sarin had been originally developed as insecticides in Nazi Germany and then used against humans. The site was suspect at first sight because the Iraqis were known to have developed in the 1980s large quantities of mustard, tabun and sarin, and although these substances evaporate when exposed to the air, the first tests showed that residues of them might still have lingered in the camp.¹¹ These were precisely the ambiguities that the Iraqi deception program was based upon, whereby any lethal material can be shown to be innocent, and any residue of chemical substance from weapons of mass destruction that were transferred to a hiding place can be dismissed as a fertilizer. It did not occur to the testing units that the spot in question, like the others in Talil and Najaf, had been used to manufacture and/or store WMD, then evacuated and its contents transshipped for hiding or eliminated, while the remnants, including the chemical raw materials that were left behind, could be said to be just “fertilizers of insecticides”. One ought to ask, nevertheless, what business do insecticides and fertilizers have to do in military camps in the heart of the desert, where there was no apparent agriculture in sight to protect?

When questions relating to circumstantial evidence are not asked, and testing in military units is limited to matter-of-fact and unimaginative atmospheric and mechanical gauging, then of course the testing units would repeat their refrain of “no-conclusive evidence”, and of “frustration” at their inability to dig up the findings that were their very *raison d’être*. By their repeated expression of “disappointment” that they did not find the incriminating material, while it was laying right there all around them, they betrayed their expectation and hope that they should have. When a literally “smoking gun” is not found in a homicide case, because it had been thrown into the river, the spent-cartridges, the corpses of the victims, the blood trail, the stains, the hair and fingerprints of the assassin are enough of an incriminating proof in themselves. If the situation were not so tragic, it would be almost comic, when sensors invariably detected chemical materials in every suspected Iraqi camp, that was left empty by the retreating troops, but then the chemical liquid found was dubbed as “probably part of organo-phosphates used in pesticides”. When such a finding was announced by the Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha in Muhawish, a town in the valley of the Euphrates, eminently suited for agriculture, one could understand the inconclusiveness of the findings, although one could guess that a spot of this sort, where the ambiguities of the chemicals’ dual use could be best played out, would fit ideally for Saddam’s ruses and hiding tactics. But in most other cases where there was no agriculture around, the testing teams could also have well transcended their technical routine, tempered in caution by the nature of their job, and ventured into some hypothesis that provided some explanations. They would have thereby contributed to the resolution of the quandary. In Muhawish, American soldiers reported nauseating and noticed welts on their hands, a sophisticated detector showed the presence of a gas agent, but the verdict read organophosphates once again, and the whole affair was dropped. No questions were asked as to why the Iraqis went to great lengths to hide eleven 20-gallon and three 55-gallon drums of thin clear liquid. If it was innocent, and no investigative reporting was done on the question, why did the soldier, who yielded this piece of information, ask not to be identified?¹² Palm branches had been cut to hide the barrels in a deep trench lined with sandbags. Who has heard of such elaborate defense afforded to fertilizer or insecticide?

The day before Baghdad fell, Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha, of the 75th XTF, was dispatched for a “three hour mission” to explore the Tabook State Company in a small town near Karbalah, to check on some “underground barrels of mysterious origin stored there”. But

two days later the team was still there, opening large storage containers that they found buried in the ground. They also found new equipment of foreign make, but “it was not clear that it was used in any weapons program”.¹³ What else did they need to clarify, and what would it take to convince them? Would Saddam deliberately **not** drop a chemical or biological bomb on American troops simply in order not to give “satisfaction” to his enemies? Why not ask, instead, why did all those barrels, which could be used also for chemical weapons, need to be buried?

Next it was Kirkuk, where American paratroopers discovered “suspicious warheads and rocket components” just outside the Iraqi government offices in town, again characterized as “tantalizing but inconclusive find”, because the officers could not determine whether they were of a design prohibited by UN resolutions, or they were built to hold chemical or biological munitions. They were found in the rear lot of the civilian governor’s complex, painted with a wide red strip, a very unlikely place of storage for that seemingly sophisticated kind of heavy munitions, unless staged to be there, to deflect the attention from something else. Five of those 5-feet long warheads were found packed in green wooden crates, with cables and missile guidance systems lying around them.¹⁴ Back in Washington, it was learned that the Americans were now setting their sights on 3 dozen sites in search for illegal weapons, selected from among the list of 1,000 laboratories, plants, military installations or storage facilities that were initially suspected of manufacturing WMD, or storing parts of them. In the preceding week the Americans had retrieved file cabinets of laboratory manuals and technical papers at some of the sites where they had looked for banned weapons. A Doc-Ex project, collecting documentation about the prohibited weapons and war crimes committed by the Saddam regime, often in conjunction with foreign parties, was underway in the Pentagon. But due to the ambivalence of the findings thus far, the best hopes of the Administration were now pinned on human intelligence to be extracted from arrested or surrendering senior Iraqi officers who would know where the materials had been hidden, or what had happened to them. Progress in the investigation of Iraq’s *al-Qa`idah* ties, which had so far also been “inconclusive”, might throw some light on the manufacturing of ricin and other dangerous gases and chemicals by the defeated *Ansar-al-Islam* in northern Iraq. The American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Myers, said that he believed the ricin gas found in an apartment in London in January 2003, had originated from the *Ansar* camp in northern Iraq.¹⁵

At the site of Karbalah, already mentioned above, a search team found radioactive material in a maintenance building, and “dual use” biological equipment that could be switched to either civilian or military use, which of course also led to “inconclusive” conclusions. But what of the fact that it was buried in metal containers under huge mounds of gravel and soil? A nuclear detection team removed seven canisters containing a radioactive isotope of cesium from the maintenance warehouse. Cesium is used to calibrate machinery in the many buildings and production facilities that were under construction on the site. After a week-long survey at this location, American experts concluded that the specific purpose of parts of that giant installation “remained a mystery”, something that could hardly be said of an innocent plant for the manufacturing of toys or candy. Maybe the experts in Washington would pour over the details maps, diagrams and the 1,000 documents which were lifted from the plant and find an answer some time in the future, if they are also willing to look for circumstantial evidence. That plant was one of Iraq’s leading ammunition manufacturing locations and it was under a mammoth expansion project when the war broke out. It is hard to imagine that anything was produced there which was not connected to the Iraqi death-machine. The UN inspector teams visited the plant in February 2003, but nothing incriminating was found there. Had there been something incriminating to be found, Saddam would not have let them in. The

inspector teams were allowed in only after Saddam cleared the plant of any evidence. This explains why the Americans found only “suspicious” materials, which, if compounded with the rest of the findings, were conclusive enough for any sophisticated detective. But the famous smoking gun, required by detectives who only work by the book and by the rules, was nowhere to be seen. The site had been visited twice before by American troops and then by a specialized team, but they missed the buried containers. It was not until American troops came in for a second time, (already the third time in all), that they came across the biggest find of all – 11 sealed and buried containers. Some of them were opened and a small chemical platoon was left behind to secure them, but the massive looting of the site by thousands of impoverished Iraqis from the surrounding villages, left the containers clean of any findings when finally a specialized team arrived to take stock of what was there.¹⁶

That was a measure of the chaotic coordination between the combat units, who had to move forward, and the specialized teams who had to arrive to the spot immediately and begin their tests, provided they were protected by the advancing troops, which was not always the case. For example, the late-coming experts found manuals of two drying ovens imported from Germany, equipment that is used to culture bacteria and viruses for biological weapons. In the first instance, the experts concluded that the containers included expensive, highly sophisticated equipment imported from Germany, Italy, Britain, China and other countries, that could be used for either military or civilian purposes. Then the experts examined a 50-foot long and five-foot high mound of packed soil and gravel. The ground-penetrating detectors revealed objects buried inside the mound. Because they had no earth-moving equipment, they hired laborers from an adjoining village who, after an entire day of vain effort, found nothing. The experts were not given the requisite equipment to test sites and move on to seek others, nor the requisite vehicles to facilitate their task, apparently due to the shift decided in the Pentagon, from searching the evasive WMD, to collecting data about Iraq’s war crimes.¹⁷ Civilians recruited by the Pentagon to help in the search for prohibited weapons, confirmed the state of confusion which existed in the field in this regard. About 50 experts, American and foreign, some of whom had worked for the UN inspection teams previously, criticized the American military search efforts as “superficial” and “misguided”, probably for their inability to piece together the evidence they found into an incriminating whole. It was felt that the whole operation might be counterproductive if left in their inexperienced hands. The Administration, which finally awoke to the ineptitude of the troops on the ground to spot the dangerous materials, and even the XTF units which followed them, was now considering to dispatch the much more trained and capable teams of recruited civilians, even though Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, visiting Iraq in mid-July 2003, admitted that the search for WMD had taken second spot in his priorities to the more urgent task of bringing order back to the country. Their task would be, as a military official termed it, “to tell the difference between Saddam’s strategic talcum-reserves and anthrax”.¹⁸ At long last, someone understood that the old technical method would not work any more.

The infighting and competition between the two Pentagon agencies – the Defense Intelligence Agency, which was supposed to coordinate the civilian effort, and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, in charge of destroying any unconventional weapons that are discovered, seemed to step on each other’s toes. The civilian group assigned the Iraq Survey Group to recruit the civilian experts from among a pool of 300 previously-trained UN inspectors from various UN agencies who had field experience in Iraq in the past. According to the Pentagon, the idea of recruiting the specialized civilians had originated from the early stages of the war-planning, and was not the result of the incompetence of the built-in military teams. Be it as it may, the failure of the detection team thus far to come up with anything beyond the “no conclusive” formula,

has certainly accelerated the process of recruiting the requisite 50 or so expert civilians. They received refresher training in Fort Benning, and were to join the 1,000-man effort to search for WMD, of which they will be the core of experts.¹⁹

In the meantime, however, the skeptics' hands were strengthened by the fact that no weapons had been found, months into the post-war period. They claimed that the arms hunt was fruitless because Saddam had none in the eve of the war, though he may have had some previously, which by they had been either destroyed or had evaporated. Moreover, in another perverse reversal, one of them suggested that even if they were found thereafter, the US would be suspected of having planted them, for it would be difficult to convince people of the justification for the war, unless some independent body like the UN confirmed the findings.²⁰ The skeptics offered no explanation, however, to all the mysteries, quandaries, questions and hide-and-seek game that Saddam played for years with the UN inspection teams.

After the war, the picture began to emerge of what had happened with the WMD programs in Iraq. An Iraqi scientist who claimed to have worked in Iraq's chemical weapons industry for more than a decade, told an American military team that Iraq had destroyed chemical and biological weapons and equipment only days before the war began. He led the Americans to a supply of material that proved to be the building blocs of illegal weapons, which he claimed to have buried so as to wipe out the evidence of his country's illicit weapons program. He also said that his country had sent secret unconventional weapons and technology to Syria, starting in the mid-1990s, and that more recently his authorities were cooperating with *al-Qa'idah*. He reiterated that Saddam had destroyed as early as the 1990s some stockpiles of deadly agents, shipped others to Syria, and focused research instead on programs impervious to detection by outside inspectors. Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha considered him credible especially after they verified on the ground some of the details he gave them, but for his own safety could not disclose his identity. These findings, which only corroborate the tentative conclusions that were independently reached above, also lend credence to the assurances of the Administration on the eve of the war that it was out to destroy those weapons, and its later contention that it would use human intelligence, provided by Iraqi defectors or turncoats, to reach evidence of the hidden chemical and biological programs. Significantly, the captured Iraqi revealed that four days before Bush gave Saddam 48 hours to leave Baghdad or face war, Iraqi officials set fire to a warehouse where biological weapons research and development were conducted, and that months before the war he had watched Iraqi officials bury chemical precursors and other sensitive material, to conceal and preserve them for future use. He showed the Americans documents, samples and other evidence of the program that he claimed to have stolen to prove that the program existed, if proof was needed.²¹

But since the "smoking gun" the opponents of the "Anglo-Saxon" war wanted to see was yet to appear, in the post-war period attacks by both European pundits and the opposition press in the US and Britain, centered upon the "cooked evidence" that Bush and Blair were accused of having staged to lure their countries into war. *The Daily Telegraph* observed that "Tony Blair stands charged in effect of committing British troops on the basis of a lie",²² and *Le Monde* flatly charged that "what we are witnessing is probably one of the biggest state lies in years. The US was in fact bluffing when it published its documentary proof... The weapons of mass destruction were just a pretext..."²³ This heated public debate further escalated with the eruption of the David Kelly-BBC scandal in Britain and the George Tenet admission that he was the origin of the erroneous note introduced into Bush's State of the Union speech in January 2003, accusing Iraq of having purchased uranium from Niger. For the American Administration, however, as voiced by Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Adviser, it was essential for the disarming nation, in this case Iraq, to show its goodwill and intention by giving the international community unrestricted access to its installations, exactly as South Africa and the Ukraine had

done with regard to their nuclear programs. Otherwise, the rogue regime of Saddam who continued to play hide-and-seek games with the international inspectors, was not worthy of any credibility even if, ironically, it had begun the process of eliminating its stockpiles of WMD.²⁴ Other writers, who have also concluded that Saddam indeed had stockpiles of prohibited weapons, were founded on Saddam's refusal to give himself a clean bill of health by answering the simple question of what he had done with the thousands of liters of anthrax and the thousands of tons of VX that he had admitted having in the 1990s. Therefore, the only remaining question was how far he progressed since 1998, when the inspectors were expelled. And when they resumed their searches in the Fall of 2002, following the Security Council Resolution, the thousands of pages his experts wrote in response to the demand of the UN, took up the old stuff of pre-1998 and added nothing to clarify the new situation. Moreover, in a February 1998 speech, President Clinton described the frightening proportions of the chemical and biological arsenal of Saddam, and urged the world to address that threat. No voluntary disarmament is known to have been done by Saddam since, hence the hesitation of many to believe that on the eve of the Iraq war all those agents had evaporated.²⁵

In an interview with Polish Television, President Bush, questioned by the concerned Poles, America's new allies, who are to participate in maintaining order in post-war Iraq, he was remarkably keen to assure his audience that some banned weapons had been found by the search teams in Iraq. Not only the mobile laboratories, used to make the weapons, received wide coverage by the media. General Keith Dayton, who headed that effort in Iraq, has said that his team would shift the focus from suspicious sites to areas where documents, interviews with Iraqis and other clues suggest where biological or chemical weapons may be hidden.²⁶ One would think that both speakers were referring to the considerable progress made by the Americans after they interrogated some of the defectors and renegades who fell into their hands, amidst the rising demands by public opinion and members of Congress to be told "where is the meat?". The critics in America were not interested in being told that only manufacturing machines or labs were found, they wanted to see the weaponized substances themselves, which had led America to war. In Britain, the frenzy to criticize Blair was so feverish, that no amount of proof of the cruelty of Saddam's defunct regime was enough, The mass-grave of 200 children who had been burned alive, which was discovered near Kirkuk, itself sending shock waves, no less than WMD, was not satisfactory to some Britons to justify the removal of Saddam in a war that was already **won**, not lost; and they continued to clamor for evidence and a smoking gun. A reporter, who visited Western Iraq, was startled by the vast amount of closed military compounds in the heart of the uninhabited desert, with hundreds of buildings, laboratories, hangars, bunkers and silos stretching to the horizon, for which Iraqi officials never provided a plausible explanation of their use. Therefore, for that author, it was not the question of whether or not Iraq had those weapons that was relevant and nagging, but its capacity of manufacturing them in those vast compounds that only now are beginning to be studied and dug up.²⁷

The reports about the discovery of Saddam's plans to revive his nuclear program, served as ammunition to American authors who could not comprehend the self-flagellation of some of their countrymen regarding the war in Iraq, after all the revelations of the mass graves, massive tortures, severe oppression, arrests and executions, corruption, siphoning public funds to the cronies of the tyrant, or to developing megalomaniac projects to please Saddam's dreams to hold weapons of mass destruction and intimidate his enemies, and cultivating a regime of fear and persecution that the Ba`ath machinery imposed, by all accounts worse than Stalin's and not far from Hitler's. Those authors reminded their audiences that during the previous Gulf War, Iraq had stored biological ammunition in pits dug in the desert or in abandoned railroad tunnels. Now that an Iraqi scientist has led the Americans to the site where the uranium enrichment equipment was buried, people should realize how difficult it is to extract the information and

should be satisfied with discovering the implements that make nuclear weapons, even if the bomb itself has not been found or is not manufactured yet.²⁸ On 21 June 2003 US forces broke into an abandoned community hall in Baghdad and seized piles of intelligence equipment and top secret documents. Some documents refer to Iraq's nuclear programs, and they were seized on the sixth day of a nationwide operation to seize weapons and insurgents dubbed "Desert Scorpion". Ninety raids were conducted in all, yielding 540 suspects, 22 of them by troops of the 1st Armored Division who had relieved parts of the Marines and the 3rd Infantry after they had fought the battle of Baghdad. Another 3 raids were done by the 4th Infantry in the area of Kirkuk in the north. In some of the seized documents, there were manifests for the delivery of communications equipment to the Iraqi nuclear agency. One letter, dated 7 February 1998, from the National Security Council of Iraq, was addressed to the Iraqi Nuclear Agency, with a carbon copy to the *Mukhabarat* (the Secret Police), attesting that not only was there a nuclear program but it was secret.²⁹ These bits and pieces are apparently the tip of the iceberg, because the US has been sitting on much more information, discovered after the reform and reinforcement of the search teams, than meets the eye, or than it is ready to admit as long as that effort has been going on and its early disclosure might jeopardize its continuation. According to preliminary information leaked, many countries, like France and Germany, would find themselves in an embarrassing situation, since many of the Iraqi WMD scientists traveled to Syria with French passports.³⁰

Finally, pending the many scandals that are bound to rise when more information becomes available, it is worth concluding this essay with some citations from Rolf Ekeus, the first Chief of the UN Inspectors in Iraq, who had accumulated more Iraq-hours right after the Second Gulf War of 1991 than anyone else:

...Chemical weapons were used by Iraq in its war against Iran (1980-8). Arguably that use had a decisive effect on the outcome: it saved Iraq from being overwhelmed by a much larger Iranian army. Furthermore, Iraq made use of chemical bombs in air raids against the Kurdish civilian population in Northern Iraq. Nerve gases such as sarin, and mustard gas immediately and painfully killed many thousands of civilians. More than 100,000 later died or were crippled by the after-effects... That meant that chemical weapons were used by Iraq both for strategic reasons against its enemies and for domestic suppression...

Regarding biological weapons, the UN Inspection Team managed after four years of investigation to confirm the existence in Iraq of a major secret biological weapons program...During debriefings in Iraq after the defection [of Hussein Kamal, Saddam's son-in-law, who was in charge of Iraq's WMD program], Iraq's biological weapons scientists, able to speak slightly more openly than normally, explained that their secret work mainly was on assignments to find means of warfare against the Iranians...

As to the nuclear weapon programs, the Iraqi authorities defended their systematic violations of Iraq's obligations under the non-Proliferation Treaty with the proposition that Iran, likewise a party to the treaty, was active in developing its own nuclear weapons. Iraq's obsession with Iran was illustrated by its air attack in 1983 on the Iranian nuclear reactors at Busher... Even the remarkable missile development in Iraq was related to Iran. Iraq succeeded in modifying and re-engineering many hundreds of the more than 800 Scud missiles bought from the Soviet Union, increasing their range from 300 kms. to 600, sufficient to reach Teheran...

The Iraqi policy after the previous Gulf War was to halt all production of warfare agents with the purpose of activating production and shipping of warfare agents and munitions directly to the battlefield in the event of war. Many hundreds of chemical engineers and production and process engineers worked to develop nerve agents, especially VX, with the primary task being to stabilize the warfare agents in order to optimize a lasting lethal property. Such work could be

blended into ordinary civilian production and activities, such as agricultural purposes, where batches of nerve agents could be produced during short interruptions of the production of ordinary chemicals....This combination of engineers, researchers, know-how, precursors, batch production techniques and testing is what constituted Iraq's chemical threat- its chemical weapon... The rather bizarre political focus on the search for rusting drums and piece of munitions containing low-quality chemicals, has tended to distort the important question on WMD in Iraq, and exposed the American and British Administrations to unjustified criticism...

The real chemical warfare threat from Iraq has two components: one has been the capability to bring potent chemical agents to the battlefield to be used against a poorly equipped and poorly trained enemy. The other is the chance that Iraqi chemical weapons specialists would sign up with terrorist networks such as *al-Qa'idah*, with which they are likely to have more affinity than do the unemployed Russian scientists the US worries about... The remnants of Iraq's biological weapons program, and specifically its now unemployed specialists, constitute a potential threat of much the same magnitude. While biological weapons are not easily adaptable for battlefield use, they are potentially the more devastating as a means for massive terrorist onslaught on civilian targets...

It is possible that Iraq, in spite of its denials, has retained some anthrax in storage. But it could be more problematic and dangerous if Iraq secretly maintained a research and development capability, run by the biologists involved in its earlier programs... Such a program would constitute a more important biological weapon than stored agents of doubtful quality...

It is difficult to understand the extent to which the terror of the Saddam years has penetrated his unhappy nation... As long as Hussein and his sons are not apprehended or proven dead, few of any of those involved in the weapons programs will provide information of their activities... The chemical and biological structures in Iraq constitute formidable international threats through potential links with terrorism... These were major threats against Iran, the Kurdish and Shi'ite populations of Iraq, and Israel... The Iraqi nuclear programs lacked access to fissile material but were advanced with regard to weapon design, with competition with Iran as a major driving factor... The fall of Saddam should give it an opportunity to rethink its own nuclear weapons program...

This is enough to justify the international military intervention undertaken by the US and Britain. To accept the alternative- letting Hussein remain in power with his chemical and biological weapons capacity would have been to continue to tolerate a continuing destabilizing arms race in the Gulf, including future nuclearization of the area... and the continued terrorization of the Iraqi people...³¹

It is then time that the Americans and the British stop torturing themselves about the "missing" "smoking gun", piece together all the circumstantial evidence listed above, and bless their respective governments for the courage they had to remove the tyrant and force him to dispose of his WMD, and to deter other potential tyrants who might have followed in his footsteps.

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