

## Strategic Insight

### Where Are Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction?

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The following piece is a summary from an article entitled, "[How Iraq Conceals and Obtains its Weapons of Mass Destruction](#)" available from *The Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, March 2003.

After the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein conducted a systematic concealment operation to disrupt the mission of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), whose mandate was to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The second team of inspectors, reconstituted as the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) had the formidable task of uncovering the work of Iraq's concealment apparatus: a network of intelligence agencies, military units and government ministries assigned to procure, conceal and defend Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. It is important now to have a full understanding of this concealment apparatus, as this can help uncover where Iraq's weapons of destruction could have been hidden. At this juncture, the U.S. forces deployed in Iraq have to unravel the activities of a network that once consisted of thousands of people from Iraq's General Intelligence, Special Security Organization, Military Industry Commission and the Special Republican Guards.

The elite Special Security Organization, *Amn al-Khas*, headed by Saddam's son Qusay, served as one of the major command and control oversight bodies of this concealment network. General Intelligence (*al-Mukhabarat*) had at least two sub-directorates involved in the concealment effort—a covert operations unit and a covert procurement unit. Military Intelligence (*al-Istikhabarat*) had a role in the strategic concealment of Iraq's WMDs, while General Security's (*al-Amn al-'Amm*) military unit, The Emergency Forces (*al-Quwwat al-Tawari'*), provided security for the facilities that housed these programs. The Special Republican Guard (SRG) (*al-Haris al-Jamhuri al-Khas*) played numerous roles in the transportation, concealment and guarding of military facilities and materials. One of the most important agencies of all in the concealment operation was the Military Industrial Commission (MIC), which was part of the Ministry of Industry and Military Industrialization (MIMI). Both MIMI and MIC oversaw Iraq's military industries and sought to conceal sensitive activities from UN inspectors.<sup>[1]</sup>

These agencies formed a vast, complex and wide-ranging labyrinth of security organizations, all of which played a role in the procurement and concealment of Iraq's WMD program. The duties and functions of these agencies overlapped, complying with Saddam's security doctrine of not allowing any one agency to have a monopoly over any one area of securing and concealing Iraq's WMD program. While the agencies played a key role in this concealment process, its coordination was clearly a family affair. One source writes of the coordination of the concealment process as, "So important was this responsibility that the small number of men selected for the task were chosen only after the most careful vetting of their families, their tribal ties, their absolute loyalty to Saddam."<sup>[2]</sup> The head of these agencies generally are from Saddam's immediate family, his al-Bu Nasir clan or from his hometown of Tikrit. Thus, if these hidden WMD facilities were to be found, members of Saddam's clan or family would need to be captured and interrogated.

In May of 1991, Saddam Hussein formed a Concealment Operations Committee (COC) to be supervised by Qusay.<sup>[3]</sup> UNSCOM inspectors became aware of the existence of this covert network as a result of inspections and interviews conducted between 1991 and 1996. They believed that this apparatus, created in 1991, was designed to hide documents, computer records, and equipment related to its WMD program. As a result, UNMOVIC, and its predecessor UNSCOM's mandate has evolved from inspection agencies to detective agencies, in order to investigate, impede and unravel the activities of this Iraqi concealment network. The U.S. forces tasked with finding these weapons will have to conduct the same investigative activities; thus, discovering where Iraq's WMD infrastructure is located could be a lengthy process.

The concealment apparatus launched a coordinated effort to thwart full discovery of Iraq's proscribed programs. The concealment apparatus destroyed or bulldozed WMD related facilities and constructed false or decoy facilities or altered suspected facilities to deceive inspectors. UNSCOM found a document in Iraq in August 1995 that demonstrates how these tactics were implemented. The Iraqi document, known as "The al-Atheer Center for the Development of Materials Production: Report of Achievements Accomplished from 1 June 1990 to 7 June 1991" recorded how the facility staff was ordered to remove evidence of nuclear weapons activities, evacuate documents to remote sites, physically alter the facility and to conduct mock inspections to prepare for UN inspectors.<sup>[4]</sup> According to Secretary of State Powell's briefing to the UN on February 5th, 2003, "We know that Iraq has embedded key portions of its illicit chemical weapons infrastructure within its legitimate civilian industry. To all outward appearances, even to experts, the infrastructure looks like an ordinary civilian operation."<sup>[5]</sup> The Iraqis learned how to conduct such tactics based on their own innovations as well as through KGB assistance in the early 1980's.

The concealment apparatus focused on concealing only critical materials and WMD components, while destroying non-essential items unilaterally or handing them over to inspectors. It was reported that these critical components of the nuclear, biological, chemical and missile programs were dispersed to the environs surrounding Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, where they were concealed in presidential palaces or the residences of Iraqi security officials belonging to the Special Security Organization and Special Republican Guards.<sup>[6]</sup> Proscribed materials and documents could be concealed in places ranging from the basements of the official state buildings to private farms of officers and officials. For example, during the last months of 1997, the Iraqis transported sensitive military materials to a large shed used to house military uniforms, within the compound of the state Ba'ath party office in Baghdad.<sup>[7]</sup> A White House report issued in January 2003, states, "We have many reports of WMD material being buried, concealed in lakes, relocated to agricultural areas and private homes, or hidden beneath Mosques or hospitals. In one report such material was buried in the banks of the Tigris River during a low water period."<sup>[8]</sup> Thus, finding the evidence of Iraq's WMD program does not merely entail searching specific WMD related facilities, but a search of Iraq itself.

Documents of Iraq's military program could also be easily concealed or evacuated from locations prior to the arrival of the inspectors or moved while armed guards were stalling the UN personnel. Documents relating to the WMD program were either destroyed or forged, or converted into microfiche to facilitate their concealment.<sup>[9]</sup> Richard Butler, former chairman of UNSCOM relates that, during one inspection, the UNSCOM team was delayed for 20 minutes in front of a facility, as the Iraqis scrambled to remove computer hard drives with critical WMD information stored on them.<sup>[10]</sup> At times, these materials were moved in the presences of UN inspectors. For example, during an inspection on September 17, 1997 inspectors witnessed the movement and burning of documents, which were then emptied into a nearby river.<sup>[11]</sup> The White House report mentions, "On January 16, 2003, a joint UNMOVIC/IAEA team found a significant cache of documents related to Iraq's uranium enrichment program in the home of Iraqi scientist Faleh Hassan."<sup>[12]</sup> Even Hans Blix referred specifically to this instance during his presentation on January 28, saying, "On our side, we cannot help but think that the case might not be isolated and that such placements of documents is deliberate to make discovery difficult and to seek to shield documents by placing them in private homes." Thus, Iraq's concealment practices including hiding documents and materials in locations considered unlikely to be found continued with UNMOVIC inspectors. Therefore documentation relating to Iraq's WMD program may still be hidden in homes or other civilian facilities.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that WMD materials are hidden in mobile facilities. An unnamed Iraqi defector details this action in an interview in Amman:

As is well known, on the contrary, these are materials that are easy to transport and that are not even excessively cumbersome. That is exactly where the military apparatuses' and intelligence services' trick lies: namely, in making these devices invisible by constantly moving them around on tanker trucks that travel either under escort or being trailed at a distance. [\[13\]](#)

German intelligence reported that WMD laboratories are hidden in trucks that appear completely normal on the outside. [\[14\]](#)

The Mojahedin-e Khalq, an armed opposition group to the Iranian government based in Iraq, has reportedly played a role in this concealment effort. Former members of this organization informed UNSCOM that Iraqi WMD equipment had been hidden in one of their training camps in the vicinity of Baghdad. When inspectors attempted to visit the site in 1997, armed guards of the Mojahedin blocked them from entering the site. It is believed that the Mojahedin facilities continue to store proscribed WMD materials. [\[15\]](#)

The vast nature of Saddam's concealment apparatus is an indication of how much he had invested in protecting the "crown jewels" of his military arsenal. The discovery of buried mobile labs near Karbala in the south of Iraq on April 14th, 2003 demonstrated that while chemical agents were not found, that Saddam did have the capability to produce such munitions. The nature of this apparatus may indicate that a "smoking gun" cache of chemical or biological warheads may not be found, but the infrastructure to create such munitions or a "breakout capability" in fact did exist.

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