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The Elusive Weapons Of Mass Destruction

By **William O. Beeman**, [Pacific News Service](#)

April 17, 2003

The stated purpose of the war in Iraq was to defend the United States from Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. Thus far no weapons have been found. Moreover, according to United Nations weapons inspector Hans Blix and two top Iraqi scientists who have given themselves up, there are none of any significance to be found.

Hans Blix has not been interviewed in the American media since the war began on March 19. However, he gave an extensive interview to the Spanish newspaper, El País on April 9 in which he made it clear that the United States' claim that intelligence sources had proof of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was doubtful at best.

Blix pointed out that U.S. intelligence services seemed to be collecting military reconnaissance information rather than evidence of weapons of mass destruction. This made it necessary for Blix to strictly delimit his activities to protect the integrity of the inspections process.

"The intelligence agents seemed to be collecting data that later were used to attack Iraqi military objectives," Blix said. "Therefore, when I was charged with the inspection effort, it was necessary to clarify the point: we would be an independent body. We would be able to receive information from the intelligence services. But this process would be a 'one way street.' The intelligence services would contribute their data, and we would perform the verification of that data. I always told them that we were not going to 'reward' them with new data collected by us.

"The greatest prize for those intelligence services and their governments would be for us to find those weapons of mass destruction.... For example, to give them an idea whether the sources that had provided the information were valid or not. But that was all. This attitude did not please them."

Blix felt that this arrangement was justified because U.S. intelligence services could not be trusted to tell the truth about their information. U.S. intelligence about Iraqi atomic weapons development and mobile laboratories had proved false.

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"Consider the case of the production of contracts for a presumed Iraqi purchase of enriched uranium from Níger," Blix said. "This was a crude lie. All false. The information was provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency (OIEA) by the U.S. intelligence services. As for the mobile laboratories, in attempting to verify the data that was passed on to us by the Americans, we only found some trucks dedicated to the processing and control of seeds for agriculture."

Blix goes on to point out that once the Iraqis began to cooperate, after he delivered a rebuke to them at the United Nations on Jan. 27, Americans became increasingly upset and started to criticize him. Finally, as the weather began to heat up and threaten the military operation, the United States completely lost patience in the inspection process and abandoned it.

When asked if he believed that weapons of mass destruction exist in Iraq, Blix expressed cautious doubts. "I originally thought that the Americans began the war believing that they existed. Now, I believe less in that possibility. But, I do not know. Nevertheless, when one sees the things that the United States tried to do to show that the Iraqis had nuclear arms, such as the non-existent contract with Níger, one does have many questions."

Blix's doubts seem to be confirmed by recent scientists who have turned themselves in to U.S. troops. In Baghdad, Lt. General Amir al-Saadi, a special adviser who oversaw Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs, turned himself in. In an interview with the German television network ZDF, he insisted Iraq had no chemical or biological weapons and that there had been no justification for an attack on his country.

Another scientist, Jaffar al-Jaffar, is being held outside Iraq at an unknown location while being interviewed by U.S. officials. According to the Arab Times of Kuwait, Jaffar has no direct knowledge of the location of any weapons of mass destruction and is being detained in the hope he can provide names of others who might know such locations.

If no weapons of mass destruction are found, the war in Iraq will mark the second failed military mission since the Sept. 11 tragedy. The first was the invasion of Afghanistan, ostensibly to destroy the Al Qaeda network and capture Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar. Al Qaeda is resurgent in southern Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar remain at large.

It is perhaps for this reason that the White House has been so adept at converting both the Afghanistan and Iraqi conflicts into "wars of liberation." This redefinition of their original purpose may play well with the American public, but it is causing the United States to lose all credibility with Middle Easterners, who see "liberation" as a well-worn code term for "conquest," and the search for weapons of mass destruction as mere pretext for the extension of American hegemony over the region.

[William Beeman](#) teaches anthropology and is director of Middle East Studies at Brown University. He is author of "Language, Status and Power in Iran," and two forthcoming books: "Double Demons: Cultural Impediments to U.S.-Iranian Understanding" and "Iraq: State in Search of a Nation." The

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